Achieving Cross-Cultural Understanding

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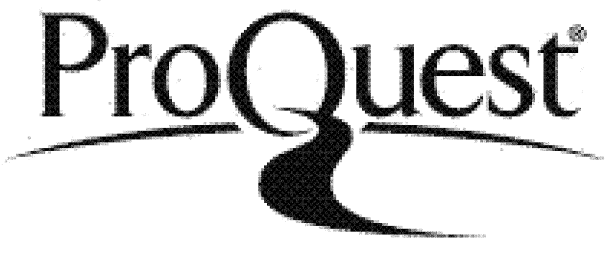

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ABSTRACT

The thesis defends a form of contextual dialogical multiculturalism as necessary to the important task of achieving cross-cultural understanding. In response to the simplified accounts of culture found within abstract liberal theory and "strong" multiculturalism, the thesis develops a position that responds to the deep reality of difference and the embeddedness of persons within different horizons, whilst at the same time sensitised to the dynamic and internally diverse nature of cultural and religious communities. Engaging with claims within contemporary debates that multiculturalism segregates communities, it is argued that a form of multicultural integration is necessary to foster connection between groups. Through appeal to a range of literature, including Anglo-Indian imaginative literature and feminist discussions of culture, the thesis develops a more subtle and nuanced understanding of culture and identity as characterised by change and continuity. Using the insights of Gadamer's hermeneutic position and the feminist "world travelling" approach, it is argued that cross-cultural understanding and dialogue can be reached only through complex recognition of the situated position from which the self and the other speak. Gadamer's metaphor of an evolving "fusion of horizons" is invoked to illustrate the ability of a dialogical contextual position to mediate a path between moral relativism and abstract universalism. The compatibility of a culturally sensitive approach with a situated universalism is illustrated through discussion of the culture of human rights, which is seen as a powerful example of universalism constructed through dialogue.

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CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION

If politics can be thought of as an on-going conversation, many of the dialogues within our political age concern how states, communities, and individuals are to respond to the challenges of diversity. The fact of pluralism raises many important questions over how groups are to accommodate each other. These accommodations arise in multiple forms, in contexts ranging from the conditions of indigenous minorities within states, such as the Aborigines in Australia and the Inuits in Canada; the political claims for separatism of groups such as the Basques in Spain; concerns to preserve minority languages such as the Welsh language in Wales; and the rights of "immigrant" communities such as Muslims in Britain. Of central importance to all of these is the issue of cross-cultural communication and understanding.

This "rise of the particular" has led to claims for the necessity of "cultural sensitivity" and a deeper understanding of each other's religious and cultural beliefs, as well as calls for certain measures needed in order to protect minority groups from what are seen as unfair pressures of assimilation to dominant cultures. However, these claims have come under increasing attack in the light of events such as 9/11 and the resulting "war on terror", which has led to a distinct impatience with claims of "identity" and a questioning over the efficacy of multicultural policies, both in the contemporary debate over multiculturalism found within political theory and that taking place in the wider public arena. Under heightened security in response to the threat of terrorism, it is argued that the focus should be on unity rather than difference. Multicultural policies are seen to segregate and alienate communities, creating cultural "ghettoes" and cultivating the conditions for the recruitment of extremists.

Within the theoretical literature, the fact that cultures are not static and closed entities, but complex and dynamic, externally overlapping and internally diverse and many-stranded, severely questions the expediency and justice of making groups as well as

individuals the starting point for political thinking. It is argued that a focus on cultures and traditions leads to a conservative position that reinforces power structures within cultures, and undermines commonalities between human beings that transcend cultural boundaries. If cultures are sites of contestation and change, it is questioned what kinds of essentialism are involved in making groups the bearers of political claims, and whose voice is heard in the "claims of culture". The contemporary public debate and the concerns within political theory closely overlap. This is seen for example in the worry that those speaking on behalf of the Muslim community are not in fact representative of it, which can lead to the frustration and alienation of those who feel they have no voice and who then channel their energies into radical Islam.

These are concerns to be taken very seriously indeed. In the face of these fears, my thesis offers a defence of a qualified multicultural position. The central thought is that responding adequately to difference is crucial to fostering cross-cultural understanding; that connection is conversely to be forwarded by attending to particularity. It is argued that universalist liberal theory and its abstract view of the individual is unable to respond sufficiently to the complexities of individuals and the deep attachments they hold to their culture, religion and so on. Attending to the historicity of self and other and to difference in a deep sense is crucial for achieving cross-cultural understanding.

Thus the central task of my thesis is that of developing a position that is situated and culturally sensitive, but at the same time responsive to the dynamic and internally diverse nature of cultures and religious and ethnic groups, and to the demands of unity and connection, as well as diversity. This is addressed through the development of a contextual dialogical position which seeks to respond to the deep attachments of individuals without restricting the internal multiplicity of culture and identity. Using the insights of Gadamer's hermeneutic position and the feminist "world travelling" approach, it is argued that cross-cultural understanding and dialogue are only to be reached through a complex recognition of both difference and similarity. The thesis argues that a contextual approach which takes a constructivist view of identity is able to mediate a path between moral relativism and abstract universalism, and is able to accommodate the situatedness of the subject whilst avoiding the charge of being conservative and conforming to the status quo. The complex discourse within

cultures, or the 'surplus of meaning' in Paul Ricoeur's terms, can be modelled to show how "culture" need not be held as necessarily in tension with the "universal", but rather is the context in which universals are given concrete form.

In an effort to move away from abstraction in theory, I explore a range of different literatures including multicultural theory, Anglo-Indian imaginative literature, philosophical hermeneutics, and the feminist "world travelling" approach. From this I aim to provide a more complete and filled-out picture of the multi-faceted nature of culture and identity and the complex dilemmas to which they give rise. Theoretical arguments are linked to the contemporary debate on multiculturalism and diversity through discussion of the experiences of British Muslims; women and contentious cultural practices; and debates concerning the culturally imperialistic uses of human rights.

Chapter 1 addresses the literature of multiculturalism or the 'politics of recognition'. This highlights the inadequacy of the liberal abstract universalist approach, or "difference-blind" liberalism, that insists on taking individuals, abstracted from their attachments, as the subjects of justice. Theorists such as Kymlicka, Young and Taylor argue that individuals cannot be disassociated from their deep social ties in this way. This literature provides an important rebuttal to the liberal individualist view of a "kaleidoscope of cultures", from which the individual freely chooses the parts of its identity, and in which identity is seen as the subject of the private sphere. The embedded position of persons within particular contexts is crucially to be taken into account in theorizing justice. While not determined by it, a person's culture or community or social group is seen to provide the context in which they make sense of their lives, and therefore how their group is treated importantly affects them. It is argued that liberal society is not neutral but is shaped by the norms of the majority, and thus that members of minority groups face additional unequal pressures to those of the majority culture.

However, it is argued that the literature of multiculturalism or the politics of recognition can at times fail to be nuanced enough. Whilst the abstract unattached individual is rightly rejected as unfeasible, the concepts of culture used within this literature can effectively reify and essentialise it. This has the potential to reinforce

internal hierarchies within cultures and place restrictions on the freedom of individuals to question cultural boundaries. Since cultures overlap and closely interact, and since within cultures there are many competing interpretations of norms and traditions, giving central importance to "cultural identities" is fundamentally problematic. Multicultural policies such as group rights risk reinforcing unequal power structures within groups and trapping individuals within given identities.

A central problem of my thesis is therefore that of how to respond with sensitivity to cultural difference, without falling into the trap of essentialising groups and artificially making their boundaries less malleable and permeable. How are we to respond to the fact of our rootedness in particular historical cultures without 'fixing' identities in ways that are conservative and restrict the natural dynamic within cultural and religious communities? While it is clear that there may be certain problems with policies which grant importance to identity such as group differentiated rights, it is argued that this should not however lead to the rejection of multiculturalism, as some liberal theorists such as Brian Barry contend. The complexity of culture points rather to the need for a detailed and contextual approach towards issues of identity, which, as well as responding to inequalities between cultural groups, takes care not to restrict the internal multiplicity of identity.

To this end, I turn to Wittgenstein's metaphor of "family resemblance" and Oakeshott's notion of identity in difference to help conceptualise an anti-essentialist view of culture and identity as characterised by fluidity; change accompanied by sameness; a constant identity amid difference; or continuity in diversity. It is argued that a dialogical multicultural position which makes a dynamic view of identity central to its account can avoid falling to many of the criticisms levelled at multiculturalism. It avoids relativism by emphasising the space for connection between people who are not trapped within their historical traditions, but for whom, crucially, horizons move.

Chapter 2 seeks to gain a fuller understanding of culture and identity by engaging with people's lived experiences as portrayed in Anglo-Indian literature. This literature provides an interesting medium through which to explore culture and identity in concrete form, since it is itself a cultural hybrid. India can be viewed as an

exaggerated instance of the complex interaction between groups that is found in all but the most closed societies. The extreme of cultural diversity in India, which is manifest in the hybrid identities of individuals, is an exemplar in an exaggerated form of the fluidity that characterizes identity in general. From out of the writings of Salman Rushdie, Leena Dhingra and Vikram Seth, there emerges a picture of the complexity and multiplicity of Indian identity that makes plain the pointlessness of trying to reduce this to notions of authenticity. The idea of cohesive cultures is challenged by the portrayal of both the overlappingness and interconnectedness existing *between* cultures, and the different and competing understandings and claims of what is authentic and valuable found *within* them. The hybrid identity of the migrant is invoked by Rushdie as a metaphor for humankind in general. This hybridity is not taken lightly, but is often presented as a highly painful experience. Thus the Anglo-Indian literature does not lead us to an easy cosmopolitan individualism such as offered by Jeremy Waldron. The literature demonstrates at once the rootedness of persons, and their capacity to move beyond their present boundaries. Thus it illustrates the complex dynamic between individual and society – whilst human beings are embedded within particular webs of norms and beliefs and cannot be understood separately from their historical context, they are not trapped within them but are active agents in cultural construction, and are constantly brought into new situations which cause them to extend their present horizons. The context of India makes vivid how living in a plural society can throw up moral dilemmas which are not consistent with the boundaries of given identities, and which can at times require the complex repositioning of individuals in relation to their previous 'fixed points'.

This chapter gives emphasis to the point that identity and recognition are not always positive, and can be used in constraining ways. The discussion of Anglo-Indian literature serves to illustrate how the lines drawn around identities by claims of authenticity and the search for "wholeness" are unsustainable. Conceptions of authentic essential identity are seen as the construct of those who project dangerously exclusive categories of what it means to be an "Indian". The portrayal of culture and identity in the Anglo-Indian literature demonstrates their sheer complexity, and thus the myth of essentialist or absolutist identities, and calls for inclusion and multiplicity. This complexity is symbolized in the plural identity of the migrant, conflict in which

is only resolved through acceptance of the different parts of the identity and rejection of the impetus to reduce it to a single "pure" and authentic identity.

These themes are continued in the third chapter through discussion of the work of the Indian feminist writer Uma Narayan in *Dislocating Cultures*. Narayan too presents a picture in which cultures are understood in dynamic and multiple terms. Importantly, the fact of their fluidity makes tradition and culture no less important: she is keen to assert that the versions of India that she and fellow Indian feminists hold are still as authentically Indian as more "traditional" conceptions. She is critical of non-Third-World writers who fail to attend to concrete contexts, demonstrating how this can lead to "colonialist representations" and oversimplifications of culture. One example of this is to be seen in the representations of the practice of *sati* or the immolation of widows. Narayan argues that "colonialist representations" by Western feminists pose an obstacle to achieving cross-cultural communities of feminists across boundaries of class, race, ethnicity, and national background (Narayan 1997: 45). She thus posits the need for a contextual approach which is sensitive to the complexity of cultural traditions and the multiple voices within them. Although Narayan speaks specifically in the context of third-world feminism, her point can be extended to illuminate what is necessary in achieving cross-cultural understanding more generally.

While making sense of agents requires that we engage with their own self-descriptions, the recognition that we need to get beyond our own terms if we are to reach understanding should not be replaced by an account which simply accepts the descriptions of the other. The argument of this thesis is that reaching cross-cultural understanding involves the forging of a new shared space for dialogue. This argument is made through a discussion of Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics and the feminist "world travelling" approach, which contend that understanding can only be reached through attention to the horizon of self and other. Gadamer argues that it is an ontological condition of understanding that that which is interpreted, and that which interprets occupies their own places in the world. When we come to interpret an object, we cannot leave our prejudices or preconceptions to one side. The "world travelling" approach developed by Maria Lugones and Isabelle Gunning can be seen as a less formal position of the same kind, yet here it becomes an active approach that can be pursued to achieve greater cross-cultural understanding. In this account,

understanding requires that we metaphorically "travel" to the other's "world" (understood in non-essentialist terms); that practices and traditions can only be properly understood within their own cultural and historical context. Gunning offers a three-pronged approach that argues that in looking to understand others, we must 1) understand our own historical context, 2) understand how we as external critics are perceived and 3) recognise the complexities of the life and circumstances of the other woman.

It is argued that the conservative implications of the contextual interpretive approach can be avoided by appealing to the idea of horizons, which, while distinct, cannot be seen as fixed and self-contained since not only do our horizons shift, but where they meet and speak, we have what Gadamer calls a "fusion of horizons". This metaphor of a fusion of horizons is appealed to throughout my thesis, to express the interaction and dialogue, and the resulting aimed-at understanding, between those of different cultural or religious backgrounds. The connections this implies invoke a conception of "thin universalism" which is not fixed and final, and which does not transcend particularity, but which is rather dialogical and intersubjective. Universal norms can be seen as existing in a dialogical relationship with cultural norms. On the one hand, universals are thin and are fleshed out in concrete cases, on the other, local norms are reinterpreted and changed in the light of the universal.

The fourth chapter seeks to situate the argument for a contextual approach within the concrete context of Muslims living in Britain, illustrating the relevance and importance of the theoretical positions under discussion. This chapter defends multiculturalism against the criticism that it segregates communities and leads to the creation of cultural "ghettoes". Critics claim that, rather than reducing alienation of members of different cultural groups within society, multiculturalism in fact exacerbates alienation, which in turn fosters the conditions for extremism. There would indeed appear to be a pressing need for more integration of minority groups and mainstream society. However, concluding that multiculturalism has thus failed is to vastly over-simplify it and to miss many of its subtle insights. It is argued that while concerns about segregation might provide a convincing argument against many multicultural policies, this is precisely when a dialogical contextual approach is needed. The insights of "recognition" are of particular importance in conditions where

members of a society share little understanding of the deeply held religious commitments of other members. The form of multiculturalism developed here is not aimed at the preservation of "authentic" identities but rather at fostering the conditions for cross-cultural understanding and dialogue, in which persons do not feel the need to choose between the parts of their "hybrid" identities. By emphasising continuity *and* change, the constructivist view of culture and identity can avoid endorsing policies which artificially close-off groups, and instead look to promote conditions for a "fusion of horizons" – in which there is a focus on integration, but where this is viewed as multicultural rather than an assimilative integration, in which the majority can learn from the minority as well as vice versa.

These points are illustrated in chapter 5 through a discussion of the events surrounding the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. This provides a pertinent example in the context of my discussions of Anglo-Indian literature. What came to be known as the "Rushdie Affair" can in many ways be seen as arising from the discomfort that can be felt in having a "hybrid" identity. In the Anglo-Indian literature, hybrid identities are viewed as at times painful, but also as the source of newness and expanded and encompassing horizons. Chapter 5 can be seen as centrally concerned with the question of in what conditions might hybrid identities enjoy the space to be worked out in expansive and open ways? The aim of this chapter is to highlight the subtle ways in which the norms of the majority pervade society, in particular the media and public channels of expression, and the ability of the majority to set the terms of multicultural debates in ways that can alienate minorities and restrict the sense in which individuals can hold hyphenated identities. In the case of the Rushdie affair, the terms of the debate were set by the majority community who tended to view it first and foremost as a dispute between absolute free speech and fundamentalism which alienated many Muslim citizens.

This affair demonstrates how failing to engage adequately with the views of the other party in multicultural disputes can lead to a breakdown in the conditions for cross-cultural communication. The claim is not that *The Satanic Verses* should have been banned, but rather to forward the simple point that, the failure of the liberal mainstream to engage with the views of Muslims, most of which can not be easily discarded as "fundamentalist", effectively exacerbated a difficult multicultural

situation. This is highlighted by analysing the affair through the approach of "world-travelling". On this approach, understanding can only be reached if one recognises the distinct horizon of the other and attempts to engage with that horizon, as opposed to applying one's own standards. It is argued that a focus on justice and principles is not enough, but must be accompanied by a more subtle, contextual approach which aims to foster conditions for cross-cultural dialogue as well as laying down principles of justice.

The fact that we are all rooted means that we need to be sensitive to the cultural lens through which we view actions. However, the aim is not to argue that multicultural sensitivity requires that we suspend judgment, and that all we can do is interpret. On the contrary, it is argued that a contextual approach is necessary to foster a shared space in which connections can be brought out through dialogue, out of which shared universals can emerge. The final two chapters set out to explore in greater depth the tensions involved here between the universal and the particular and in mediating a path between them; in other words, the difficulties involved in working out a situated or "thin" universalism.

Chapter 6 explores the transformative potential of a contextual, dialogical approach to cross-cultural understanding. Here I engage with the criticism posed by Okin and others that cultural sensitivity comes at the expense of the protection of women's rights. It is true that the defence of certain cultural practices is likely to impact more on women and girls because of the way in which patriarchal cultures tend to control or at least inform the private arena, traditionally the domain of the woman. Thus policies which are aimed at protecting traditions can hinder women in their attempts to challenge existing arrangements. However, while it is crucial that the role of women is not simply accepted, an abstract universal approach can project its own meanings on others, and lead to a distorted view of "other" women as passive "subjects", obscuring their active agency in the creation and reinterpretation of cultures. The chapter argues that it is possible to mould a contextual, culturally-sensitised approach which is capable of being transformative, and which indeed will be more so since changes are more likely to take effect if presented as attached to local norms and not imposed externally.

The argument is that if we take seriously the multiplicity within cultural and religious communities, cultural sensitivity does not have to lead to a conservative position. The dynamic view of culture is developed through the notion of the surplus of meaning used by Paul Ricoeur, and the idea of the "social imaginary" as used by Moira Gatens. It is argued that universals should not be construed as existing in tension with cultural traditions; rather that the space of contested norms within cultures, or the social imaginary, can provide a middle ground for negotiation between universal rights and cultural norms. Thus it is argued that a form of multicultural sensitivity which rejects static representations of identities need not be 'bad for women' – indeed, that the dynamic of change within cultures is more likely to be encouraged through multicultural dialogue rather than the distancing effects of applying putatively universal standards.

The final chapter looks in more detail at the shape of a situated universalism, or the idea of universals in transition. It is argued that a contextual dialogical approach of the kind laid out throughout the thesis is compatible with a certain kind of universalism that is not foundational but rather emerges from and is strengthened through dialogue. In response to challenges to the universality of human rights such as those coming from "Asian values", the chapter rejects the portrayal of human rights as an imposition of one culture on another and instead contends that human rights can be seen as articulating a shared international consensus on core norms, which are seen as being in a two-way dialogue with, rather than as in conflict with, contextual norms and traditions. This is developed by comparing the growth of the human rights culture with customary law.

The potential of a dialogical contextual approach to provide a path between foundational" universalism on the one hand, and "antifoundationalism" or relativism on the other, is developed through discussion of the notions of universalism found in the writings of Richard Rorty, Michael Walzer and Charles Taylor. Rorty argues that there are no universal foundations to which we can appeal as justification for human rights. However he argues that this makes them no less defensible, and that the search for foundations should be replaced by a focus on the spreading of solidarity and manipulating of sentiments through, amongst other things, sad and sentimental stories. It is argued that Rorty's substitution of emotion for reason is, however,

premature, the lack of transcendental philosophical foundations does not mean that reason is redundant, and that Rorty's ethnocentric defence of human rights is both alienating and unnecessary.

In contrast to Rorty, both Walzer and Taylor recognise the importance of attending to particularity. Walzer defends a view of universalism as thin or 'reiterative' and rejects what he calls 'covering law' universalism. It is argued however that while Walzer importantly addresses our differences, he underestimates the role of interaction in the construction of a broader universal consensus on values. The suggestion is not that universals are validated by dialogue, but rather that they can be supported via many different routes that are specific to different cultural horizons. This is backed up through Taylor's argument that we may reach a consensus on something similar to human rights, but that this may be sustained from different cultural values, and may be given different priorities in a continual process of negotiation and renegotiation.

Through the discussions in these chapters I aim to demonstrate that a dialogical contextual form of multiculturalism is able to overcome the dichotomy between the universal and the particular. A multiculturalism which responds to the changeable nature of identity and tradition, as well as its continuity, can avoid essentialising cultural boundaries. Rather than reinforcing difference, it is argued that the contextual approach allows the space for connection to come to the fore, and that, through enabling persons to feel secure in their identity, it need not encourage segregation between communities, but rather fosters the conditions in which a multi-way dialogue or "fusion of horizons" is possible.

CHAPTER 1

The complexity of culture: between the universal and the particular

Introduction

At the outset and preliminary to the substantive discussions found in subsequent chapters, the aim of this chapter is to introduce some of the important themes that are central to my thesis. These revolve around the question of how we are to respond to, and navigate, the fact of diversity: the fact that there exists a diverse array of peoples both within states and between states, who hold different values, and what Rawls calls 'comprehensive doctrines'. A great deal of literature within political theory over the past few decades has been concerned to highlight the inadequacy of individualist and universalist responses to diversity. It is claimed, to varying degrees, that the guise of impartiality and universality conceals a particular outlook, which is oppressive of minority groups and which is insensitive, and even hostile, to non-Western culture.

This chapter focuses in particular on a range of literature which falls under the various headings of multiculturalism, the politics of recognition or difference theory. The purpose of discussing this literature is to delineate the terrain and landscape that my own argument will have to navigate. The aim is not to reject it, but rather to use the discussion of its ideas on the way to a clearer appreciating of cross- and intra-cultural understanding. There is much to be held of value within this literature, in particular in its conception of individuals as deeply embedded, its emphasis on the limitations of universalist modes of thinking, and its highlighting of the intersubjectivity of meaning. If cross-cultural understanding is to be achieved it is crucial that we recognise the situated place from which we speak (which is not to say we cannot defend the universality of at least some of our values). However, it is argued that in much of this literature, the concepts of culture and identity at work often fail to be sufficiently complex. Theories which make the protection of diversity their starting point have an inadvertent tendency to reduce the very multiplicity they value. This has

more than theoretical importance since it can artificially reinforce boundaries around groups and trap individuals within oppressive traditions.

Thus the focus of this chapter is on the question of how to be sensitive to cultural diversity, without essentialising and reifying identities, and without ossifying individuals within cultures. A related question is that of how might we respond to individuals as situated within cultural contexts without doing away with grounds for universal standards? The chapter is divided into three sections. The first lays out a general overview of the positions in the multicultural debate. The second section introduces some problems with these and seeks to gain a more nuanced understanding of culture and identity. Section 3 outlines a response which is culturally sensitive, yet resistant to the charge of being culturally conservative and reifying existing boundaries. It is argued that a dialogical contextual multicultural approach is able to steer a path between cultural relativism and strong universalism.[1] The approach that I argue for is animated by a complex vision of connection and difference, following the world travelling approach (to be discussed in chapter 3). On the one hand, this maintains that we cannot hope to understand the kinds of issues to which diversity gives rise, both within and between communities, unless we acknowledge the situatedness of ourselves and others within particular historical contexts. On the other, it stresses our connectedness and the existence of shared universals, which are seen as arising out of, and being strengthened by, shared dialogue and interaction.

1. The multicultural debate

Andrew Vincent notes that recent political theory has witnessed a 'shifting momentum to the particular', that is, 'a gradual but marked shift of interest away from universalist forms of argument towards favouring communities and groups' (Vincent 2002: 1). This move towards particularism includes within it a vast array of positions

[1] I am using the term multicultural to refer both 'to the state of a society or the world containing many cultures that interact in some significant way with each other' (Gutmann 1993: 171) and to refer to theories of multiculturalism, which make normative recommendations concerning how this multicultural reality is to be addressed. The use of multiculturalism in both senses would seem to reflect its usage within contemporary debates about the 'merits of multiculturalism', which refer to more than the merits of many cultures interacting with each other, and rather describe the political approach towards this empirical circumstance. This is the usage for instance seen in a recent article in *The Guardian* which noted that Ruth Kelly, the communities secretary, 'called for a "new and honest debate" on the merits of multiculturalism' (Wainwright 2006).

which forward stronger or weaker challenges to abstract universalist thinking. Critics of liberal individualism maintain to varying degrees that the individual is embedded within and constituted by her culture or community, and thus that it makes little sense to address individuals in abstract terms. At the extreme, cultural relativists and communitarian thinkers argue that moral values are culturally embedded and relative to each society. Individuals are wholly constituted by their community, as expressed, for example, by the communitarian Michael Sandel, for whom

> community describes not just what [individuals] *have* as fellow citizens but also what they *are*, not a relationship they choose (as in a voluntary association) but an attachment they discover, not merely an attribute but a constituent of their identity (Sandel 1998: 150).

Since moral values are relative to different communities, the attempt to base them on a universally shared humanity is seen to be a logically incoherent enterprise. What is forwarded as impartial universalism is in fact the particular product of liberal individualist culture, the enforcement of which upon other cultures amounts to oppressive imperialism.

This chapter focuses on the literature of "multiculturalism", the "politics of recognition" or "difference theory". While these do not present a homogeneous position but rather a set of wide ranging and disparate viewpoints, it is possible to highlight some common themes. This literature can be seen to stand at some distance from the communitarian thesis, arguing that it rests on an implausible notion of culture. Tying moral values to community borders does not hold up since the world is not made up of discrete and self-contained cultures and communities, but rather is a complex network of interconnected and overlapping groups, that share a commonality, albeit a "thin" one. Multicultural theorists do however tend to give a partial defence of the social thesis, which criticises the abstract concept of the individual in liberal theory as unable to take seriously the deep attachments of the individual to her cultural group. The focus is on inequalities that exist between different groups, in particular, the injustices arising from unequal status of minority groups vis-à-vis majorities.

Central to these positions is their shared critical stance toward the claims of procedural or "difference-blind" liberalism to respond adequately to diversity through impartiality. I first give a brief outline of this kind of liberalism, before turning to look at the multicultural critique of it.

Liberal democracy is centrally committed to the equal representation of all and has historically sought to achieve this through prioritisation of the individual rather than collective identities. Liberalism has traditionally condemned group-based exclusions and discriminations and denied that there are any significant differences between persons which should lead to differential treatment. This is often called "difference-blind" or procedural liberalism on the grounds that it applies equally to all individuals and no person is to be given differential treatment on the basis of membership of a particular group. Procedural theories of justice argue that the state should be neutral between competing conceptions of the good and should take a merely procedural role, which protects, by way of a system of laws and individual rights, the space in which each person or group can pursue his, her, or their own ideas of the good life. It relies on a distinction between the right and the good, classically made by W. D. Ross in *The Right and the Good* (Ross 1930). The role of the state is not to project ideas of the good but to restrict itself to ensuring that citizens deal fairly with each other and that the state deal equally with them all (Taylor 1994: 57). The aim of liberalism is not to eradicate pluralism, but to protect it by remaining neutral between conceptions of the good and ensuring equal opportunities for all by granting each individual an identical set of rights and liberties. On this view, which finds one of its strongest defences in Brian Barry's *Culture and Equality*, there is no need for group differentiated treatment, since procedural or 'difference blind' liberalism is seen to adequately safeguard the space for diversity through a comprehensive system of rights and laws. Granting special rights to minorities is unfair since it privileges some individuals over others. Its very neutrality and the fact that laws apply to all persons equally, regardless of group identity, are seen as its strengths.[2]

Theorists of multiculturalism argue however that, since the state is biased towards the majority culture, a so-called "impartial" approach is both unequal and inherently

[2] For discussion of this see Barry (2001).

assimilative. It is argued therefore that truly equal treatment requires recognition of specific identities. The core of the multiculturalist claim is that individual identity is shaped by and provided through membership of groups, therefore these groups, of which the focus is often religious and cultural groups, are the necessary context which make free individual choice meaningful and possible. The literature argues that since a person's cultural identity is crucial to their ability to lead a fulfilled life, different groups should recognise and respect the cultural practices of others and avoid imposing their own norms on them (Freeman 2002: 19).

Since a person's group is an important part of their life, how this group is treated will importantly affect them. Margalit and Raz argue for example that a person's sense of their own identity is bound up with their sense of belonging to encompassing groups and that their self-respect is affected by the esteem in which these groups are held. Therefore, 'individual dignity and self-respect require that the groups, membership of which contributes to one's sense of identity, be generally respected and not be made a subject of ridicule, hatred, discrimination, or persecution' (Margalit & Raz 1995: 87). For Raz, the focus is not on group identities for their own sake, but rather on the role they play within individual lives and especially in what they contribute to individual identity. He maintains that

> [t]his is no group-fetishism, no valuing of mystic collective entities at the expense of concern for humans. It is recognition of the dependence of personal identity and personal meaning on people's membership of, and identification with, a wide range of groups, national, religious, professional, and more (Raz 2001: 35).

Iris Marion Young shares a similar view, arguing that social groups provide the context within which our identities are shaped, and consequently the way in which they are treated will affect the individual members of that group. She argues that the tradition of liberal individualism promotes an assimilationist ideal which holds a voluntarist conception of the self and denies the reality of cultural differences (Young 1995: 162-3). Young argues that bias against groups such as women, people of colour, disabled people and gays and lesbians is deeply embedded in current institutions and policies. Thus Young's argument for group-differentiated treatment is made firmly on grounds of equality. Affirmative action is aimed at increasing the participation and inclusion of disadvantaged groups and is necessary not to compensate for past

discrimination, but to 'mitigate the influence of current biases and blindnesses of institutions and decision makers' and so to 'intervene in the processes of oppression' (Young 1990: 198).

Similarly, for Will Kymlicka the argument for the protection of culture is made firmly in terms of what it provides for the individual.[3] He offers a distinctly liberal theory in which minority rights are importantly limited by principles of individual liberty, democracy and social justice (Kymlicka 1995b: 6).

> Liberals should be concerned with the fate of cultural structures, not because they have some moral status of their own, but because it's only through having a rich and secure cultural structure that people can become aware, in a vivid way, of the options available to them, and intelligently examine their value (Kymlicka 1989: 165).

For Kymlicka, then, cultures are not intrinsically valuable, but are rather so because they provide the context in which individuals can lead an autonomous life. He argues that freedom involves making choices amongst various options, and that it is our societal culture which not only provides these options, but also makes them meaningful to us. It is for this reason that our societal culture needs to be protected (Kymlicka 1995b: 83).[4]

One of the principal proponents of the 'politics of recognition' is Charles Taylor. Taylor argues that "difference blind" liberalism effectively constitutes a form of misrecognition of minority groups since it is not neutral but is in fact the political expression of a particular culture. He notes that in so far as it is understood from the vantage point of Islam, this is particularly viewed as growing out of Western Christianity (Taylor 1994: 62). For Taylor also, the link between the need for recognition and the recognition of collective identity lies in the contention that cultures are worthy of protection since they are essential to our sense of identity.

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[3] Raz and Kymlicka can both be called 'perfectionist liberals', as they see the task of liberalism as not that of remaining neutral but as that of encouraging and defending the key liberal value of autonomy (Kelly 2002: 8).

[4] Kymlicka's concept of 'societal culture' will be discussed in section 2 below.

For Taylor, recognition is 'a vital human need'; *mis*recognition 'can inflict a grievous wound, saddling people with crippling self-hatred' (Taylor 1994: 26). However authenticity for Taylor is not about achieving a 'unitary self', rather he emphasizes the diversity of the self's 'moral sources'. Our identities are complex and many-tiered. They are constituted both by what we see as universally valid commitments (such as being a Catholic or an anarchist for example) and also by what we understand as particular identifications (such as being an Armenian or a Québecois). At different times we may declare our identity as defined by only one of these, because that is what is salient in our lives, or because that part is put in question. But 'in fact our identity is deeper and more many-sided than any of our possible articulations of it' (Taylor 1989: 28-9).

For Taylor, human identity has a fundamentally dialogical character. One can only become a self and achieve 'self-definition' in relation to other conversation partners (Taylor 1989: 36). 'We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression', where language is taken in a broad sense to include not only speech but also other modes of expression through which we define ourselves – art, gesture, love, and so on (Taylor 1994: 32). Our sense of self is negotiated through an ongoing dialogue with others: '[w]e define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us' (Taylor 1994: 32-3). One cannot be a self on one's own, but can become one only through interaction with conversation partners, within 'webs of interlocution', participation within which is essential to achieving self-definition initially, and for a continuing grasp of the languages of self-understanding (Taylor 1989: 36). It is our cultural communities that provide the context in which these dialogues take place, which provide the 'common language', the 'common space' of shared meanings, with which our conversations familiarise us (Taylor 1989: 35-6). It is only against the background of these webs of interlocution that the self is able to make coherent choices 'about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance...and what is trivial and secondary' (Taylor 1989: 28).

In relation to this framework or horizon we understand ourselves in narrative form. The self is changing and on a 'quest'. There 'is something like an a priori unity of a

human life through its whole extent'; we must be able to tell a story of our lives that has some meaningful unity (Taylor 1989: 51-2). For Taylor, this requires that the self is able to orientate itself to the good which is provided through access to one's community. This need for narrative unity provides the link between identity and the need for recognition. It comes from the fact that our identity is:

> partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being (Taylor 1994: 25).

A similar view of the importance of recognition is shared by Axel Honneth, who argues that 'we owe our integrity... to the receipt of approval or recognition from other persons. [D]enial of recognition... is injurious because it impairs...persons in their positive understanding of self' (Honneth cited in Fraser 2002: 26).[5]

The challenge of recognition is then that the unequal position of minorities to the majority in society constitutes a damaging misrecognition of identity. The uniform application of rules under procedural liberalism fails to realise the extent to which the state is in fact biased toward the majority group within society. No state can be neutral, but is culturally loaded and hence society will be biased in favour of the values of the dominant culture. Veit Bader observes that '[a]ll political myths and constitutions, as well as citizenship and civic and political culture, are inevitably historically and ethnically colored' (Bader 1997: 776). Since the liberal state is biased towards liberal culture, the commitment to equality of opportunity of theorists such as Barry is inherently unequal (Kelly 2002: 11).

[5] Taylor suggests that dominant groups 'tend to entrench their hegemony by inculcating an image of inferiority in the subjugated' (Taylor 1994: 66). That misrecognition has often been used as a deliberate tool of oppression is clear. In the case of women and black people for instance, patriarchal or white society respectively have projected a demeaning and inferior image of them which has often been internalised in ways that effectively make it one of the most potent instruments of their own oppression. Similarly, colonizers projected images of the colonized as inferior and uncivilized in ways which were often accepted by the colonized peoples, who tried to emulate their oppressors (Taylor 1994: 25-6).

Young contends that the liberal approach of undermining group based oppression through neutral impartiality or "difference-blindness" is inadequate in circumstances where there are cultural differences among groups and in which some groups are privileged. If some groups have greater economic, political or social power, 'their group related experiences, points of view, or cultural assumptions will tend to become the norm, biasing the standards or procedures of achievement and inclusion that govern social, political and economic institutions' (Young 1995: 163).

Thus theorists of multiculturalism or recognition argue that it is necessary to respond to people not as abstract individuals, as Rawls does in his original position, but as members of particular groups. Since minority cultures face additional pressures to those faced by the dominant culture, they might need special protection to enable them to survive. Multicultural theorists contend that individual rights must be supplemented by certain group rights if liberal policy is to be truly neutral in its effects. For example, exemptions concerning uniform rules of dress might be necessary to accommodate deep religious beliefs. An example often referred to here is that of Sikh men and the claim that they should be exempted from having to wear a crash helmet when riding a motorcycle. The claim within the multicultural literature is not for complete equality, nor that cultural practices should not change, but rather that this change 'should take place under conditions of rough equality, and that [cultures] should be protected from enforced assimilation or annihilation' (Bader 2001: 268).[6] For this, the role of the state is not to be neutral, but to be responsive to conceptions of the good life.

[6] Complete equality of groups is impossible since the dominant ethnicity, dominant religion, and dominant versions of history of a polity are inevitably inscribed into its political identity (Bader 1997: 793). This identity inevitably limits a state's capacity for fairness, as Parekh writes:

> Every society has a distinct culture and history, and structures its time and space in specific ways. Neither all units of time, be they hours, days, weeks, months or years, nor all units of space, be they streets, buildings, towns, or lands, are or ever can be culturally neutral. They are suffused with deep meanings and carry different kinds and degrees of moral and emotional significance. No society can therefore totally avoid being biased against some of the practices of, and thus discriminating against, its cultural minorities. Its identity limits its capacity for fairness, and to ask it to be indiscriminately tolerant in the name of fairness to minorities is to be unfair to it. If our concept of fairness does not take into account the demands of communal identity, it becomes abstract, impracticable, politically irrelevant, and a source of much avoidable guilt (Parekh cited in Bader 1997: 793).

For Taylor, the fact that procedural liberalism ignores pressures on minority cultures to surrender their identities and conform to the dominant culture means that not everyone has an equal chance of achieving authenticity. Taylor asserts that in a society that has collective goals, such as the preservation of the French language in Quebec, the rigidities of the procedural neutral model of liberalism are impracticable, indeed it is 'axiomatic for Quebec governments that the survival and flourishing of French culture in Quebec is a good' (Taylor 1994: 58-9). A society with strong collective goals is seen as perfectly compatible with liberal values as long as it also respects diversity and offers adequate safeguards for fundamental rights (Taylor 1994: 59). Thus for Taylor, the liberal state should not be neutral but should recognise the value of different cultures and accommodate cultural survival.

Kymlicka contends that to conceive the debate in terms of group or collective rights as in conflict with individual rights is misleading. In his J. C. Rees Memorial lecture, he demonstrates how the blanket application of universal rights can in fact serve to reinforce discrimination against minorities. For example, the human right, guaranteed by the UN Charter, to free mobility within the territory of a state can be used as an instrument of oppression against national minorities. National governments can encourage migration to the historical territory of the national minority in order to gain access to their natural resources, or by disempowering them politically, by turning them into a minority within their own traditional territory (Kymlicka 1998: 6). Therefore certain land rights or language rights might be necessary to reduce the number of migrants into the territory or ensure that those who come are willing to integrate into the local culture (Kymlicka 1998: 8). Unless 'supplemented by minority rights, majoritarian democracy and individual mobility rights may simply lead to minority oppression' (Kymlicka 1998: 16). Kymlicka argues that the minority are effectively only claiming the right to the same protections enjoyed by the majority culture.

2. The plurality of culture and the problems of multiculturalism

These positions importantly draw attention to the unequal consequences that can result from an "impartial", individualistic approach to pluralism. However, this section contends that the conceptions of culture and identity within the literature of

multiculturalism can fail to reflect their complexity and multiplicity. The accounts of groups at times appear to implicitly rely on essentialist conceptions of cultural boundaries as fixed and clearly delineated. The descriptions of cultural or ethnic groups can fail to accommodate cross-cutting forms of difference, such as gender, which do not coincide with cultural borders (Walby 2002: 116). Cultures are not sealed and self-contained worlds of shared norms and traditions but are fluid and continuously evolving. They are not closed-off to each other, but rather exist in a complex web of cross-cultural interaction and connections. They might be seen, in Seyla Benhabib's words, as 'constant creations, recreations, and negotiations of imaginary boundaries between "we" and the "other(s)"' (Benhabib 2002: 8).

Benhabib contends that a culture appears as a homogenous "whole" only from an external vantage point – from within, a culture presents itself through shared but contested narrative accounts which form not a seamless whole, but 'a horizon that recedes each time one approaches it' (Benhabib 2002: 5). Cultures are not in possession of an authentic essence, but are rather the products of an on-going construction, formed through complex dialogues with other cultures (Benhabib 2002: ix). The identity of groups is constructed largely through interaction with other groups, and tied up with the perception of what they are *not*, rather than what they are. Appiah notes for example that the Malay came to know one another as such only after, and in opposition to, the arrival of the Chinese, and Hindu identity gained salience only in opposition to Muslims in India (Appiah 2005: 64).

Cultures do not fall neatly within boundaries but are ragged at the edges, permeable and overlapping. Within cultures, one finds multiple diverging strands and fundamentally different outlooks on life. For instance, Umberto Eco notes that within the western world there are many who believe that technological development, the expansion of trade, and faster transport are worthwhile, which might be taken by many to characterise the west. However, also within the western world, there are many others who reject this and who primarily wish to live in harmony with an uncorrupted environment, and who are willing to relinquish air travel, cars and refrigerators, 'to weave baskets and travel on foot from one village to another, as long as the ozone hole isn't there' (Eco 2001).

Taking group identities as the starting point for politics can reify and essentialise cultural identities. Multicultural policies can 'impose a single, drastically simplified group identity, which denies the complexity of people's lives, the multiplicity of their identifications and the cross-pulls of their various affiliations' (Fraser 2002: 24). Focussing on groups can restrict the freedom of individuals and artificially enforce the ties of the individual to her culture, effectively reducing the multiplicity of the self, and limiting the space for change. It potentially reinforces hierarchies within cultures, and enhances the power of the group's leaders to interpret their group's culture and to determine which of its aspects will be safeguarded (Lyshaug 2004: 309).

Theories of multiculturalism are often very sensitised to these problems, notably those of Parekh, Kymlicka, Taylor and Young. They are keen to avoid essentialist accounts of identity, for instance Young's relational theory of difference offers a non-essentialist view of group identities whereby a social group does not have an essential nature but rather 'exists and is defined as a specific group only in social and interactive relation to others' (Young 1990: 161). They seek to overcome the abstraction which is viewed as a flaw in individualist liberal theory and look to concrete cases in order to show the internal diversity of communities. Whilst emphasis is given to the embeddedness of human beings, this is not to the neglect of cross-culturally shared human properties. Taylor and Parekh, for example, argue that we share an overlapping cross-cultural consensus on certain universal norms, but that this can be justified in different ways from within comprehensive cultural horizons (Parekh 2000: 127, Taylor 1999).

The type of "groups" that qualify for differential treatment are also heavily restricted and not all groups are to count. For Kymlicka for example, while groups are to be protected because they provide the range of options for the individual, this would not be supplied by a narrow religious group. It is interesting that he is much more pro-integration, especially in relation to economic immigrants, than most commentators want to acknowledge. He draws a distinction between national minorities and ethnic groups. It is only national minorities, and some categories of ethnic minorities, that would be afforded a full range of minority rights, the rights of protection and of inclusion. Ethnic groups are characterised as 'loose associations' of immigrants who 'typically wish to integrate into the larger society, and to be accepted as full members

of it' (Kymlicka 1995b: 10-11). While they might seek greater recognition for their ethnic identity, according to Kymlicka their aim is not that of becoming a separate and self-governing nation, but rather to modify the institutions and laws of the mainstream society in order to make them more accommodating of cultural differences (Kymlicka 1995b: 11).

National minorities, or what Kymlicka calls 'societal cultures' qualify for more extensive rights than ethnic minorities. The fundamental premise is that they somehow have a prior claim on the territory now occupied by the dominant culture. They are defined as 'previously self-governing, territorially concentrated cultures' which have been incorporated into the larger state. A societal culture 'provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres' and is typically territorially concentrated and based on a shared language. These minorities 'typically wish to maintain themselves as distinct societies alongside the majority culture, and demand various forms of autonomy or self-government to ensure their survival as distinct societies' (Kymlicka 1995b: 10, 76). Kymlicka's group rights are not aimed at the preservation of existing cultural arrangements, rather they are intended to safeguard the space which is needed for groups to change at their own pace and not to be 'swamped' by the dominant culture. For example, the aims of the Québécois in Canada are to resist the pressure to assimilate and to preserve their existence as a culturally distinct group – where this identity is not seen as 'authentic' as in seeking to live the same way that their ancestors did, but rather is viewed as 'always adapting and transforming' (Kymlicka 1995: 8). In contrast to Jeremy Waldron's cosmopolitan view (to be discussed below), this is not seen as incompatible with cultural borrowing. For Kymlicka there is 'no inherent connection between the desire to maintain a distinct societal culture and the desire for cultural isolation'. It should 'be up to each culture to decide when and how they will adopt the achievements of the larger world. It is one thing to learn from the larger world; it is another thing to be swamped by it' (Kymlicka 1995b: 103-4).

Yet despite this emphasis on fluidity, even Kymlicka's restricted sense of "group" as qualifying for group rights is problematic. It is argued by theorists such as Carens and Benhabib that Kymlicka's characterisation of societal culture as the sole and

comprehensive determinant of choice homogenizes culture and obscures the multiplicity of our cultural inheritances and the complex ways in which they shape our context of choice (Carens 2000: 56, 69); that indeed there is in fact no such thing as a "societal culture" that extends 'across the full range of human activities' (Benhabib 2002: 60). The idea that all one's affinities are provided by a particular group does not reflect the complex cross-cutting pulls on one's identity, some of which (such as gender) transcend the borders of one's culture. The implausibility of such a view is illustrated by Carens in asking what this would mean in the context of multi-faith Quebec: 'Would it make sense to say that Quebec's societal culture passes down Judaism as an option to its members or that Islam is a possibility made available by Canada's Anglophone culture?' (Carens 2000: 70).

Arguments for minority cultures' protection within states can be based on claims of group identity that effectively affirm 'a group's right to define the content as well as the boundaries of its own identity' (Benhabib 2002: 70). This can unwittingly serve the purposes of conservative and powerful elements within cultures. Ayelet Shachar notes how well-meaning accommodations 'may leave certain group members vulnerable to maltreatment within the group, and may, in effect, work to reinforce some of the most hierarchical elements of a culture'. The claim is that, in attending to inequalities faced by minorities vis-á-vis the majority, a politics of recognition might reinforce internal injustices within cultures, thus creating a "paradox of multicultural vulnerability" (Shachar 2000: 65).

Affirming claims for recognition can affirm the interpretations of those with the power to assert their interests as the 'norm'. Regarding the wider group as the bearer of cultural rights affirms the existing power structures by privileging the understandings of the dominant elite within the minority culture. Claims for group rights tend to reflect the internal power lines within the group since the self-proclaimed leaders are unlikely to be representative of all or even most of the group members (Okin 1999: 121). The multicultural construction of group voice can 'inadvertently collude with authoritarian fundamentalist leaders who claim to represent the true 'essence' of their collectivity's culture and religion' (Yuval-Davis 1997: 201). It can thus reinforce the subjected position of minorities within groups, creating permanent minorities within minorities and undermining the ability of

minorities within minorities to effectively challenge the existing structure. By affirming existing cultural arrangements, it undermines the internal dynamic of change within cultures and restricts the opportunities of internal minorities to reshape their cultural community (Kukathas 2000: 236).

It is worries of this kind that are expressed in the contemporary public discourse on multiculturalism, which in the present political climate, is largely focused on Muslim communities. Members of a group might seek to move beyond traditionalist structures of the group. For example, a recent documentary looked at the lives of members of the younger generation of immigrant Pakistani Kashmiri communities.[7] These communities were governed by the patriarchal structure of Biraderi, run by tribal elders, that has been directly transplanted from the villages of Pakistan to Britain's cities. Many of the younger members were portrayed as feeling alienated by the strict traditional values, and as struggling to break free from the patriarchal system. Where group rights such as those concerning education and language are concerned, the worry is that multicultural protections allow the space for fundamentalist leaders to assert their conception of Islam on young and impressionable Muslims. On the other hand, where there is multicultural representation, such as The Muslim Council of Britain, the degree to which those speaking on behalf of the Muslim community are in fact representative of it is questioned. Those youths who have become radicalised claim to have had no voice.

Kymlicka seeks to avoid trapping individuals within existing cultural structures by drawing an important distinction between two types of collective rights. 'Internal restrictions' are designed to protect the group from internal dissent, and 'external protections' are intended to protect the group from external pressures to change (Kymlicka 1995: 35). The former 'refer to the right of a group to limit the liberty of its own individual members in the name of group solidarity or cultural purity' a position that Kymlicka argues must be rejected. External protections on the other hand refer to the right of a group 'to limit the economic or political power exercised by the larger society over the group, to ensure that the resources and institutions on which the minority depends are not vulnerable to majority decisions' (Kymlicka

[7] *Dispatches*, 'Young, Angry and Muslim', Channel 4, Monday 24 October, 2005

1995: 7). Given the cultural bias of the state, these might be thought of as providing protections which effectively put the minority group on an equal footing with the majority. Internal restrictions on the other hand seek artificially to *preserve* the culture by placing restrictions on internal change. Thus Kymlicka concludes that

> liberals can and should endorse certain external protections, where they promote fairness between groups, but should reject internal restrictions which limit the right of group members to question and revise traditional authorities and practices (Kymlicka 1995: 35).

However, even this qualification is inadequate. For example, feminists such as Susan Moller Okin emphasise that what goes on in the private sphere importantly impacts on the ability of individuals to challenge and participate in the writing of cultural scripts. Thus, ruling against internal restrictions on members and ensuring a right of exit is insufficient for protecting the interests of women. While Kymlicka is keen to argue that we must not 'inhibit people from questioning their inherited social roles', his emphasis on cultural rights would seem to risk allowing just that (Kymlicka in Okin 1999: 21).

Similarly, problems are to be found with making diversity a value in itself. For Parekh, diversity is not something to be reluctantly accepted and accommodated but should rather be seen as a positive value to be cherished and fostered. One reason why diversity is valuable is that it serves as a viewpoint from which we can look back at our own cultures (Parekh 2000: 12, 167). This is an important point – different others may provide a mirror in which to see ourselves, and cross-cultural interaction may open up new horizons. However, this cannot provide an argument for protecting diversity. Making the protection of diversity an object of policy is unable to differentiate between desirable and undesirable forms of diversity, and threatens to reify and artificially freeze existing forms of diversity. Taylor's argument for cultural survival, not just survival of the culture for people now, but survival for future generations, is also vulnerable to this kind of criticism. For Taylor, policies aimed at survival 'actively seek to *create* members of the community', for instance, in Quebec, they aim to ensure that future generations continue to identify as French-speakers (Taylor 1994: 58-9). Yet this restricts the freedom of future individuals to participate in their own cultural creations.

Emphasising group identities might also restrict the space within which an individual might alter or invent her identity on a more subtle level. Brenda Lyshaug contends that

> by encouraging individuals to think that their identities emanate most fundamentally from a neatly bounded cultural community, and by encouraging individuals to affiliate primarily with that community, a politics of recognition elicits an inappropriate and even an inauthentic response to the diversity of forces that typically shape modern personal identity (Lyshaug 2004: 311).

She suggests that the 'political entrenchment and celebration of cultural scripts' exerts pressure on group members which binds them more tightly to the expectations, attributes and norms encoded in their culture's script. This effectively restricts the freedom that individuals would otherwise feel if they were allowed to appropriate their culture's norms and attributes in their own distinctive ways (Lyshaug 2004: 311).

In sum, the move to a focus on groups rather than the individual would seem to favour a conservative interpretation of group identities as static and unchanging.[8] The claim that cultures need to be recognised because they are the source of individual identity is problematic. Individual identities are defined 'through many collective affinities and through many narratives' (Benhabib 2002: 16) and the focus on the defining characteristic of groupness, be it culture, religion, ethnicity and so on, prioritizes that aspect of an individual's identity at the expense of other aspects. It is quite possible that the goals of the collective might be in conflict with other aspects of one's identity. For example, the goals of nationalist movements might be in conflict with those of women's movements (Benhabib 2002: 53). Policies of 'identity' can give artificially restrictive importance to present accepted characterizations and resting points of identity. Identities are not fixed, but are plural and changing. This is seen for

[8] However, by a similar token, it is important that this is not viewed in terms of remaining in one's oppressive culture or opting out. Theories which try to escape many of these problems by safeguarding a right of exit are questionable. Kymlicka and Benhabib both stress freedom of exit (Benhabib 2002: 131, Kymlicka 1995b). Aside from practical considerations of the fact that there is usually no real alternative and thus opting out doesn't present a real option, this view appears to favour an implicitly conservative interpretation of culture, where if one is unhappy with current interpretations, the onus is on leaving, rather than changing, one's culture. But as Raz argues, the thought of discarding our culture makes little sense, '[w]e do not reject our culture when we find it replete with oppression and the violation of rights; we try to reform it' (Raz 1999: 97).

instance in Salman Rushdie's description of his identity, which might be taken to represent the extreme end of the spectrum of what is the common experience of all individuals. He writes:

> I was born an Indian, and not only an Indian, but a Bombayite—Bombay, most cosmopolitan, most hybrid, most hotchpotch of Indian cities. My writing and thought have therefore been as deeply influenced by Hindu myths and attitudes as Muslim ones...Nor is the West absent from Bombay. I was already a mongrel self, history's bastard, before London aggravated the condition...The point is this: Muslim culture has been very important to me, but it is not by any means the only shaping factor (Rushdie 1992: 404).

The point is that this is far from exceptional. As Amy Gutmann puts it, not all people may be as multicultural as Rushdie, but most people's identities are shaped by more than a single culture: not only societies, but people, are multicultural (Gutmann 1993: 183). As will be discussed in the context of Anglo-Indian literature in the following chapter, the hybrid identity of the migrant to some extent provides a metaphor for identity in general.

Individuals are not trapped within the bounds of their cultures. People do not just passively exist within cultures, but rather are active in constructing them, questioning present resting points and offering competing interpretations of dominant norms. While human beings are embedded within particular webs of norms and beliefs, we are capable of going beyond them. As Benhabib writes

> [a]lthough we do not choose the webs in whose nets we are initially caught, or select those with whom we wish to converse, our agency consists in our capacity to weave out of those narratives our individual life stories, which makes sense of us as unique selves (Benhabib 2002: 15).

Thus while we may be born into webs of interlocution as Taylor argues, it is not clear that these coincide with the supposed boundaries of groups. We are both the constructors of, and constructed by, the complex web in which we exist. Humans are both rooted and capable of movement; whilst we are capable of creativity, this creativity is constrained by our circumstances. This is best characterised by the metaphor that Oakeshott uses in describing language in *On Human Conduct*. Language obviously constrains us, but only in the way that a musical instrument does.

An instrument has a limited range of notes, but this does not restrict our ability to compose an infinite number of melodies (Oakeshott 1975: 91).

On this understanding, culture and the individual are inseparable, but only in the sense that without musical notation, scales, harmony, timbre and so on, the composition of our own distinctive melodies is impossible. Sen writes that while our freedom in choosing our identities takes place within particular constraints, there is nothing surprising about this:

> it is in fact entirely unremarkable. Choices of all kinds are always made within particular constraints... The point at issue is not whether any identity whatever can be chosen (that would be an absurd claim), but whether we have choices over alternative identities or combinations of identities, and perhaps more importantly, whether we have some freedom in deciding what priority to give to the various identities that we may simultaneously have (Sen 2005: 351).

People's choices are constrained by certain givens, for example the recognition that they are Jewish or Muslim, but there is still a decision to be made by them regarding what importance to attribute to this particular aspect in comparison to other aspects of their identities.

3. In defence of a dialogical multicultural approach

From the above discussion, it is apparent that recognition of groups does threaten to simplify the complexity of culture and identity. Thus it is clear that as well as looking at relations *between* groups, it is necessary to be sensitive also to the complex internal debate within cultures. However, while acknowledging these criticisms leads some egalitarian liberals and anti-essentialist theorists to conclude that the project of multiculturalism is therefore to be rejected, this too involves oversimplification. Many of the critiques of multiculturalism are insensitive to its complexity and respond to a caricature of the position, (e.g. Barry), focusing exclusively on "group rights", which are only a part of multiculturalism, and missing many of the subtle insights of multicultural theories. This chapter wants to argue that, while it is right to take a sceptical stance when claims are made in the name of "culture", this does not require a rejection of multiculturalism, and that its insights are crucial for fostering and

maintaining cross-cultural communication. The "supermarket of life" view of cosmopolitans such as Jeremy Waldron is incapable of responding adequately to the deep attachments of individuals to their cultural and religious identities. For Waldron, while immersion in a particular culture 'may be something that particular people like and enjoy', they cannot 'claim that it is something that they need' (Waldron 1995: 100). His 'cosmopolitan alternative' sees people as living 'in a kaleidoscope of culture' of which they can pick and choose parts at will. This is illustrated by the Quebecois mother who eats Chinese food and reads Grimm's Fairy Tales to her child whilst listening to Italian opera. These do not come from a single cultural matrix but are rather testament to the immense variety of cultural materials available to us (Waldron 1995: 107).

Waldron argues that while Kymlicka's account of why membership of a culture is crucial to the leading of a full life demonstrates that access to a culture is necessary in order to achieve human flourishing, from this alone it is not clear why this leads to the need for recognition of one's own culture. Waldron contends that, from the fact that the options available to us must have a cultural meaning, it does not follow that there is only one cultural framework which provides these meanings: 'Meaningful options may come to us as items or fragments from a variety of cultural sources' (Waldron 1995: 106). Waldron therefore rejects the claims discussed in section 1 that how one's culture is treated importantly bears on one's own self-respect.

While there is much in Waldron's cosmopolitan account that is valid, taking examples of food and music as representative of culture trivializes it and fails to get to the heart of what is at issue in multicultural dilemmas. Even if individuals are capable of – and in many cases in the modern world, have no choice but to be capable of – moving beyond their most intimate webs of identification, they do not do so easily but rather this often involves complex inner struggles. There may be no incommensurability between different "cultures", but neither is there complete translatability, and treating one's religious beliefs and other deep attachments as "voluntary" and to be likened to one's taste in cuisine is unlikely to help achieve cross-cultural understanding in multicultural disputes. My thesis will argue that the channels of communication between different horizons are more likely to be opened up by taking seriously the deep bonds of individuals to their cultural or religious community. Thus the worries

that multiculturalism leads to the segregation and alienation of groups may be right as far as many multicultural policies are concerned, but do not wholly refute the claims of multicultural recognition.[9]

Therefore it should be clear that my aim is not to reject the views of multiculturalism, but rather to use their general concerns as a point of departure. It is crucial that we respond to the reality of difference. That cultural groups can be seen as in some sense imaginary should not be taken to mean that cultural differences are shallow or somehow unreal or fictional (Benhabib 2002: 7). Anti-essentialism should only go so far; identity and culture can not be left so "fluid" and "open" as to be unable to say relevant things for actual persons with complex identities.[10] In rejecting essentialist accounts of groups, the point is not that groups don't exist; we are not left having to endorse the view of Baumann, that 'culture is not a real thing, but an abstract and purely analytical notion' (Baumann 1996: 11).

Therefore, the question to be addressed is that of how we can speak about cultures without essentialising them and falsely homogenizing their borders. Here it is useful to appeal to the philosophy of Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein points out that knowledge is in many cases inarticulate, but that this makes it no less usable. The fact that we cannot articulate precisely what something is makes it no less a usable concept – we do not need to be able to give a specific meaning in order to know what we are talking about when we use a term. This is illustrated through the example of a game. Wittgenstein argues that there is no single essential property which is shared by all things that we refer to as a game, rather they are characterised by 'a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing' (Wittgenstein 1968: 66). Our concept of game is extended in the same way 'as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre...the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres' (Wittgenstein 1968:

[9] While I have discussed above how a politics of recognition can restrict the internal open-endedness of the self, theorists such as Tariq Modood and Bhikhu Parekh would argue that recognition is needed precisely in order to secure the conditions in which the individual can be secure in her identity and thus less likely to draw it in narrow terms (see for example, Bhabha & Parekh 1989 and Modood 2005). This will be addressed in chapter 4.

[10] Brubaker and Cooper argue that, in the concern to cleanse the term "identity" of its theoretically disreputable "hard" connotations and insisting that identities are multiple, malleable, fluid, and so on, theorists who take a "soft" view of identity risk leaving us 'with a term so infinitely elastic as to be incapable of performing serious analytical work' (Brubaker & Cooper 2000: 11).

67). This idea is extended by Wittgenstein through the metaphor of family resemblance. Whilst one member of a family may share a similar nose to his sister and eyes with his mother, there is no single feature that runs throughout the family.

This notion allows the concept of cultures to be used without falling into cultural essentialisms. Cultures can be seen as ineffable and indefinable. The point is that it is not necessary to be able to give a clear definition of groups in order to use the concept; everyone knows what is meant by 'group'. The notion of family resemblance can be applied both to the relation of members within cultures, and to that between cultures. This allows culture to be seen not as closed and finished entities but as internally diverse and overlapping with other cultures. Whilst there are similarities to be found between particular cultures, no one thread runs continuously through all, except perhaps at the highest level of abstraction. Cultures are woven of many strands, and some of these strands will be shared by those who's identities otherwise diverge (Fraser 1997: 84).

Whilst there is a continuous identity in difference, there is no essential essence that provides this identity. This can be conceptualised by invoking Oakeshott's notions of identity in difference and continuity and change. While a given thing may change, it is never complete change, some things remain the same. Oakeshott's notion of the continuity of tradition through change is illustrative of the point: 'It is steady because, though it moves, it is never wholly in motion; and though it is tranquil, it is never wholly at rest' (Oakeshott 1981: 128).

This enables us to conceive of the borders of cultures in terms that are both firm and open; at once continuous and changeable. While individuals are not trapped within cultures, we do however speak from within situated horizons. The problem that animates my thesis can be seen as that of how to respond with sensitivity to cultural difference, without falling into the trap of essentialising groups and artificially making their boundaries less malleable and permeable. How do we find a balance between sensitivity to difference and respect for the individual? How are we to respond to the demands of particularism whilst retaining the need for critical reflection and avoiding sliding into a pernicious relativism? The task is that of negotiating the terrain between encumbered, embedded individuals rooted in culture, and broader, if not universal

principles, that make different cultures commensurate, and allow for possibilities of dialogue and understanding between them.

Multicultural theorists have importantly highlighted how individuals face particular inequalities due to their membership in a group, and thus the need to work with a more complete notion of the person than the abstract individual chooser. This thesis argues that the recognition of some group-based differences is necessary and need not be seen as necessarily reinforcing and reifying given identities or in contradiction with a commitment to individual freedom. The contention is that if the dynamic of change within culture is made central, a multicultural dialogical account does not have to fall prey to the kinds of problems discussed above. Benhabib argues for example that:

> Social patterns of representation, interpretation and communication, which oppressed minorities and excluded groups justly criticize, can also be transformed through an acknowledgement of the fluidity of group boundaries, through the telling of stories of the interdependence of the self and the other, of "we" and "them" (Benhabib 2002: 70).

This implies a complex path between a focus on what is shared and universal on the one hand, and difference and the particular on the other. The argument of my thesis is that attending to difference conversely allows connections to come to the fore, and encourages the forging of new shared horizons. The aim of this final section is to begin to flesh out this claim and consider what form a non-essentialising approach to diversity might take.[11]

It would appear that the worries discussed above become problems for multicultural theories when they attempt to identify in advance which groups might be the bearers of legitimate claims for recognition. It is this pre-emptive move which leads multicultural theorists towards the kinds of problems of essentialism I have been looking at. A promising way forward here is the turn to democratic theories of

[11] Young's conception of 'relational difference' offers one possibility. This rejects attempts to overcome the oppressions of exclusion through assimilation on the one hand or separatism on the other. On this relational conception of difference, groups 'should be understood not as entirely other, but as overlapping, as constituted in relation to one another and thus as shifting their attributes and needs in accordance with what relations are salient' (Young 1995: 157). Thus difference is seen as contextual, emphasising both the reality of social difference and our interconnectedness, making apparent 'both the necessity and possibility of political togetherness in difference' (Young 1995: 157).

recognition. Here recognition claims can not be decided in advance but must rather be tested in terms of how they withstand the test of the exchange of public reasons (Tully 2004: 858).

Nancy Fraser makes an important argument of this kind. She argues that, given the institutionalised patterns of cultural value, justice does in some cases require 'recognizing distinctiveness over and above common humanity' (Fraser 2002: 38). But the claim is not the problematic one along the lines of cultures need to be recognised because they are the source of individual identity. What needs to be recognised is not group specific identity but rather 'the status of group members as full partners in social interaction' (Fraser 2002: 24). Demands for recognition of group identities are assessed by the norm of *participatory parity*, that is, of whether they can be seen as looking to widen the scope of social participation by challenging unequal dominant cultural values, or whether they seek to restrict some individuals or groups from the possibility of participating on a par with others in social interaction.

Misrecognition is wrong not because it impedes human flourishing, but because it 'constitutes a form of institutionalized subordination – and thus a serious violation of justice' (Fraser 2002: 26). On this 'status' model, misrecognition occurs when institutionalised patterns of cultural value in society work in such a way as to constitute some individuals and groups as less than full partners in social interaction (Fraser 2002: 24-26). Claimants 'must show that current arrangements prevent them from participating on a par with others in social life' (Fraser 2002: 32).

The standard of participatory parity works both at the *inter*group and *intra*group level, supplying both the standard for assessing the effects of institutionalised patterns of cultural value on the relative standing of *minorities* vis-à-vis *majorities*, and to assess the *internal* effects of minority practices for which recognition is claimed (Fraser 2002: 34). This 'double requirement' for claims for cultural recognition can be illustrated through the example of the on-going controversy in France over the wearing of the *foulard* or headscarf. The claim some years ago was that forbidding Muslims girls to wear the headscarf in state schools constituted unjust treatment of a religious minority. On Fraser's status model, to count as a legitimate claim it must firstly show that it denies an equal level of parity for the minority group with the

dominant group. This can be understood as being the case, since at the time there was no similar ruling outlawing the wearing of Christian crosses. Secondly, it must demonstrate that it does not limit the participatory parity of some within the religious group, i.e. that the headscarf does not amount to the subordination of women. This has proved much more controversial – where French republicans and liberal observers argued that it is a marker of subordination, multiculturalists argued that its meaning is highly contested within Islam and that to see it as wholly patriarchal is to defer to the interpretations of male supremacists, effectively granting them sole authority to interpret Islam (Fraser 2002: 35).

Thus there is still the necessity for dialogue in working out what the norm of participatory parity requires. But it is removed from being set either in the terms of the powerful majority, or in the terms of claims for identity. By drawing cultural equality in terms of parity of participation, the 'status' approach avoids essentialising and homogenizing groups and resists the move toward separatism and group enclaving. Instead of valorizing asserted identities, the focus is on making transparent the way in which 'institutionalized patterns of cultural value can be vehicles of subordination' – that current laws can reflect the values of the dominant group in such a way as to disadvantage non-members. By construing recognition in terms of justice rather than ethics, it avoids the worries of cultural relativism by freeing the normative force of recognition claims from dependence on a specific substantive horizon of value (Fraser 2002: 25). By construing recognition in terms of justice rather than subjective conceptions of the good life, it allows for judgements to be made about the relative worth of practices and traditions. Fraser's specific point is that it thus allows for a certain kind of politics of recognition which is not in tension with the theorizing of redistribution.

Responding to identity claims by the norm of participatory parity requires an important shift away from essentialising claims about the internal make-up of groups to a focus on the hidden inequalities of power within multicultural societies. Similarly, Benhabib claims that certain sorts of recognition can be compatible with a universalist deliberative democracy model. Claims of recognition can be accepted to the extent that they are movements for 'democratic inclusion, greater social and political justice, and cultural fluidity' (Benhabib 2002: viii-ix). For Benhabib, claims

for recognition must be subjected to public debate in which all those who might be affected by the consequences of adopting a norm can have an equal say in its enactment (Benhabib 2002: 147). Part of the aim of this kind of multiculturalism is to expand the public sphere in order to make it more inclusive. In this way, multicultural policies are aimed at increasing dialogical interaction between cultural groups within society – hence multiculturalism does not segregate communities and foster separatism but rather seeks to increase a sense of belonging.[12]

This is similar to the view of multiculturalism forwarded by Parekh. The aim of multiculturalism for Parekh is to foster a community which creates and encourages the space in which cultural groups are able to interact, enrich the existing culture and create a new consensual culture in which minority communities are able to grow at their own pace, and in which they can recognise reflections of their own identity (Parekh in Bhabha & Parekh 1989: 27). The justification for multicultural rights in this thinking is not the protection of culture, rather it is about increasing the parity of individuals within democratic cultures. The protection of culture is then effectively a by-product of challenging the power of the majority.

The aim within this thesis is not to extend a model of how states should respond to cultural diversity and the claims of culture, for what these should in practice be will vary according to the circumstances of different societies and cultures. The aim is rather to argue against the abstract theorizing of culture, and instead to call for a complex and nuanced response in cross-cultural issues. The choice is not between assimilation or separatism, rather, as Young has observed, there are many more complex responses in between that are better able to match the complexities of particular cultural circumstances. My concern is to insist that cultural sensitivity, not assimilation, is crucial – and that this need not lead to cultural separatism or cultural relativism. It is argued that a dialogical situated universalism can be achieved only through a complex understanding of both our differences and our connectedness, that conversely through attending to our separateness, our connectedness can be brought to the fore. If we are to understand each other, we must recognise in a real way the situated context from which ourselves and others speak. As will be discussed in

[12] This argument will be addressed in chapter 4 below.

chapter 3, unless the intersubjectivity of meaning is taken seriously, we are likely to project our own categories of meanings onto the other. If we fail to interrogate our perceptions and assumptions, we risk the 'overhasty assimilation of the [other] to our own expectations of meaning' (Gadamer 1989: 305). Cross-cultural understanding is seen to emerge from a dialogue in which the participants attempt to become more aware of their own assumptions or 'prejudices'.

Thus it is maintained that entering into real and equal conversation with those who are different from us requires that we attend both to the horizon from which we and the other speak. We must replace what Benhabib calls the transsubjective perspective which 'reflects the view of the *observer* who analyzes and judges social relations', with the perspective of intersubjectivity, which seeks to engage with 'the standpoint of individuals qua *participants* in social life' (Benhabib 1986: 12). The argument is for an inter-textual, contextual approach centred on multicultural dialogue. Each person might be seen as at once a voice to be heard, and a text to be read, and must in turn hear the voices and read those outside the culture as tests inviting interpretation.

Yet while it is crucial to try to understand others within their own context, the aim is not just to describe the other in her terms. Given that things do go wrong internally, we can not simply suspend disbelief. That cultures share a 'family resemblance' means that, as a logical point, translation across cultures is possible. Thus there are grounds for a thin universalism. There is no innate incomprehensibility between those who in some sense inhabit different horizons. Where different perspectives meet and somehow speak to each other, the idea is that they create a new shared horizon of mutually intelligible meanings, or what Gadamer terms a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer 1989: 306). Thus universal norms need not be seen as in necessary tension with cultural norms.

A 'genuine "universalism" or universality is possible only through the interaction and mutual transformation of sedimented particularities' (Dallmayr 2001: xiv). As Parekh argues, while there are universal moral values, these cannot be understood in the abstract, but rather as existing in a 'creative interplay between them and the thick and complex moral structures of different societies'. Universal values are wrongly viewed as a set of uniform, passive and external constraints. Rather they need to be

interpreted, prioritized and reconciled in the light of the thick moral structures within particular cultures (Parekh 2000: 127). These themes touched upon are to be elaborated on and explored in more depth in the following chapters.

Conclusion

This chapter has been intended to highlight the care that is needed in approaching issues of culture and identity. I have drawn attention to the ways in which taking "group identities" as the starting point for politics can artificially entrench the "borders" of cultures in ways which simplify and constrain identities. Since cultures are fluid, multilayered and overlapping, and are likely to contain multiple diverging voices within them, a strong identity thesis which takes unproblematized collective identities as the starting point for political policies fails to pay sufficient attention to the power structures within cultures that decides whose voice it is that is heard, which can reinforce the subjection of vulnerable groups within cultures.

However, this should not lead us to conclude that we should reject the aims of multiculturalism. Many of the insights found in this literature are crucial if we are to respond adequately to the issues thrown up by diversity. This chapter has argued that recognition of some group-based differences is necessary and need not be in contradiction with a commitment to individual freedom. I have argued that it is crucial to take account of our differences as well as what we share. We cannot hope to reach meaningful understandings spanning "horizons" unless we explicitly attend to the concrete situations from which our selves and others speak. A contextual approach which makes central a view of culture and identity as characterised by both continuity and change can avoid reifying cultures. The following chapter looks to develop this view of the complexity of culture and identity through an exploration of its portrayal in Anglo-Indian literature.

CHAPTER 2

The multiplicity of culture and identity in Anglo-Indian literature

Introduction

I have argued that identity is more complex than much of the literature on "recognition" would lead us to believe. Identity is characterised by fluidity, change that is accompanied by sameness, a constant identity amid difference, or continuity in diversity. In this chapter I intend to illustrate this through an exploration of identity as it is portrayed in Anglo-Indian literature. Here we can take the extreme of cultural diversity manifesting itself in individuals and constituting hybrid identities that betray a rootedness in rootlessness in order to establish that the extreme is merely an exaggeration of what identity is for almost everyone.

The literature of "Anglo-India" provides a rich resource for the study of cultures and identities. It demonstrates the sheer complexity of culture and identity and the futility of trying to draw encompassing borders around these. The language of authenticity, and the search for wholeness, can fail to appreciate the inevitable multiplicity of identity, which is constantly in flux as the self manoeuvres to accommodate new encounters. To speak of essential authentic identity may be to collude with its construction by conservatives who wish to preserve an ideal or authentic self deferential to a particular authority structure. This chapter seeks to illustrate that identity and recognition may not be wholly positive, and that identity itself may be a constraining trap.

The justification for turning to literature is that it provides a way of looking at individuals not in the abstract, but in the context of the complexity of everyday moral life. Exploring identity through the embedded characters of imaginative literature makes plain that, while the argument of cultural determinism might be easily refuted, the individualistic rational chooser is equally unrepresentative of real persons with deep attachments. The Anglo-Indian literature is an appropriate focus precisely because it is

itself a cultural hybrid. The authors discussed, namely Salman Rushdie, Leena Dhingra and Vikram Seth, can themselves be seen as examples of the ideas of displacement, migrancy and hybridity about which they write. All three authors were born in India but now live in the "West". The very fact of their writing in English points to the complex hybridity of identity, placing them at the periphery of two worlds, and opening up a pluralized third space which neither assimilates difference nor clings to a "pure" authentic identity. Rushdie writes that:

> Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the *cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies* (*Imaginary Homelands* 17, italics added).[13]

The use of English displays the permanence of the colonial influence, the futility of trying to eradicate it and get back to some notion of previous purity. Yet at the same time, in the way in which it is taken and adapted and used towards new purposes, it demonstrates the fluidity of these boundaries.[14]

In the following three sections, I explore these issues through the writings of Rushdie, Dhingra and Seth in turn, and in the fourth and final section I draw out further some of the implications this has for the discussion of multiculturalism within political theory.

1. Salman Rushdie and the multiplicity of identity

For Rushdie, India is not 'neat and restrained and highly selected', but 'crowded and excessive and vulgar and overblown and far too much for anyone to take in at any given time' (Rushdie 2003: 12). It is 'by its very nature superabundant, heterogeneous, many things at once' (*IH* 32). Rushdie uses the very style of his writing to portray the multiplicity of identity, the excess and 'too muchness' (Rushdie 2003: 12). His deliberate intermingling of generic forms – myth, realism, the comic epic, science

[13] For the sake of clarity, all Anglo-Indian texts under discussion in this chapter will be referenced by title or abbreviated to initials. *Imaginary Homelands* will be referenced as *IH* from hereon.

[14] This is symbolized in Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, in which Rai and Vina speak in the eclectic makeshift language of Rushdie's home town, Bombay: 'a sentence could begin in one language, swoop through a second and even a third and then swing back round to the first. Our acronymic name for it was *Hug*-me. Hindi Urdu Gujarati Marathi English' (*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* 7).

fiction – is a conscious expression of the heterogeneity he urges us to embrace. His eclectic style mirrors 'the state of confusion and alienation that defines postcolonial societies and individuals' (Afzal-Khan 1993: 143).

This experience of disjuncture, metamorphosis, fragmentation, is ever-present in Rushdie's writing. Rushdie was born into a Muslim family in 1947, the year of Indian independence, in cosmopolitan Bombay. He was sent to school in England, during which time his family moved to Pakistan (hence he has been 'in a minority group' all his life, first 'a member of an Indian Muslim family in Bombay, then of a 'mohajir' – migrant – family in Pakistan, and now as a British Asian' (*IH* 4).) His experience of living in Bombay – 'a metropolis in which the multiplicity of commingled faiths and cultures curiously creates a remarkably secular ambience' (*IH* 16) – coupled with parents who were not particularly devout, has led Rushdie to feel that Hindu culture is just as much a part of his heritage as is Islam (*IH* 16). His version of India has always been 'based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity' (*IH* 32).

Rushdie is concerned with the peculiar condition of being an almost member of two worlds, and a not-quite member of either. He writes of *The Satanic Verses*:

> If *The Satanic Verses* is anything, it is a migrant's-eye view of the world. It is written from the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis (slow or rapid, painful or pleasurable) that is the migrant condition, and from which, I believe, can be derived a metaphor for all humanity (*IH* 394).

For Rushdie, crucially, something is also to be gained in the experience of translation. Thus in *Shame* he states that 'I, too, am a translated man. I have been *borne across*. It is generally believed that something is always lost in translation; I cling to the notion [...] that something can also be gained' (*Shame* 29). To the pain which can accompany the experience of being 'borne across', or the experience of "inbetweenness", the resolution for Rushdie is clearly found in embracing this newness. He writes:

> Those who oppose the novel most vociferously today are of the opinion that intermingling with a different culture will inevitably weaken and ruin their own. I am of the opposite opinion. *The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies,

> songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. *Mélange,* hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world.* It is the great possibility which mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it. *The Satanic Verses* is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves (*IH* 394).

He celebrates intermingling and hybridity, and abhors purity. From the birth of a nation to the redrawing of identities, the question is 'how does newness come into the world?...Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made?' (*SV* 8).

The notion of multiplicity is central to *Midnight's Children.* The story is told 'in a manner designed to echo...the Indian talent for non-stop self-regeneration' (*IH* 16), the narrative punctuated with tangents, new stories, life histories of one-show characters. The main protagonist and narrator, Saleem Sinai, 'makes use, eclectically, of whatever elements from whatever sources he chooses' (*IH* 16). Stories are told beginning at the end, chopping up the order in which the story is traditionally told, reflecting the sense of fluidity, of cultures and ideas running into each other in an endless continuum. While the novel is ostensibly the autobiography of Saleem, through the device of making Saleem's birth 'the precise instant of India's arrival at independence' – midnight on August 15th, 1947 – Saleem's personal story is interwoven with the history of the new independent state. Thus Saleem is 'mysteriously handcuffed to history' (*MC* 9) and descriptions of himself stand also as descriptions of the nation. From the beginning we learn that Saleem contains multitudes 'jostling and shoving' inside him – and we are repeatedly told by Saleem that if we are to understand him we will have to 'swallow multitudes' (*MC* 9).

Hence the literal multiplicity of India, the sheer number of different versions, is symbolized in Saleem's own body, which is fragmenting into millions of tiny pieces:

> I am not speaking metaphorically; nor is this the opening gambit of some melodramatic, riddling, grubby appeal for pity. I mean quite simply that I have begun to crack all over like an old jug – that my poor body, singular, unlovely, buffeted by too much history, subjected to drainage above and drainage below, mutilated by doors, brained by spittoons, has started coming apart at the seams. In short, I am literally disintegrating, slowly for the moment, although there are signs of acceleration. I ask you only to accept (as I have accepted) that I shall eventually crumble into (approximately) six

> hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious dust (*MC* 37).

This inability to contain the whole is illustrated by Saleem's writing of his autobiography. Saleem's writing of his history is closely linked to his day job as a pickler, indeed all the action in the present-day takes part in a pickle factory:

> And my chutneys and kasaundies are, after all, connected to my nocturnal scribblings – by day amongst the pickle-vats, by night within these sheets, I spend my time at the great work of preserving. Memory, as well as fruit, is being saved from the corruption of the clocks (*MC* 38).

The significance of this is that what Saleem is "preserving" is in fact *one version* of "India". Significantly, he makes mistakes in the telling of this history, gets dates wrong and so on, therefore providing 'only a fragment of the whole truth' (Crane 1992: 179). This backs up Rushdie's postmodern view that comprehensive patterns of history, of culture and identity, must be abandoned and replaced with diverging tales (Geertz 2000: 222). Given the sheer complexity and diversity of India, there cannot be a single history, but rather many histories – Saleem's story serves to remind us that this is a subjective process, and that which are chosen and elaborated are done so for particular reasons.[15]

The rejection of essentialisms and absolutes takes a central role in the *Satanic Verses*. The idea of essential authentic identity is cast as a conservative construction. The character of Zeeny Vakil provides a vehicle for Rushdie's views:

> She was an art critic whose book on the confining myth of authenticity, that folkloristic straitjacket which she sought to replace by an ethic of historically validated eclecticism, for was not the entire national culture based on the principle of borrowing whatever clothes seemed to fit, Aryan, Mughal, British, take-the-best-and-leave-the-rest? – had created a predictable stink, especially because of its title. She had called it *The Only Good Indian*. 'Meaning, is a dead,' she told Chamcha when she gave him a copy. 'Why should there be a good, right way of being a wog?' (*SV* 52).

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[15] This illustrates Sunil Khilnani's point that the events of India's past, and its present, are so multiple and diverse, that any telling of it must be partial: 'The substance of the Indian past was so diverse, so discontinuous, and often so downright contradictory that present desire, far from an embarrassing intrusion, was actually essential to discerning a pattern and order that could show it to be a 'history''(Khilnani 1997: 159).

The notion of authenticity, that there is some such thing as 'a good Indian', that some essence exists to be authentic *to*, is continually confronted in *The Satanic Verses*. Identities are set up only to be undermined. At the centre of the novel stand Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta, two actors who enter the novel in mid-fall from a blown-up plane and miraculously survive. The myth of authentic Indian identity is symbolized by the song Gibreel Farishta sings as he falls through the air (*SV* 5):

> *O, my shoes are Japanese*
> *These trousers English, if you please*
> *On my head, red Russian hat-*
> *My heart's Indian for all that*

Saladin, who emigrated from India twenty years before, has had a life long love affair with London: he has 'sought to become that which he most admired, dedicated himself with a will bordering on obsession to the conquest of Englishness...striven to become new' (*SV* 256-7). His carefully cultivated English accent sometimes disturbingly slips back into the Bombay lilt which he has so diligently unmade (*SV* 34). His artificial identity is symbolized by his job as a voice over actor – 'man of a thousand voices and a voice'. However his carefully constructed identity falls apart when instead of landing at Heathrow he lands somewhere on the coast of Cornwall. He is quite literally transformed into a devilish goat and is 'demonised' by the police who, unsurprisingly failing to believe the story that he fell from the sky, arrest him as an illegal immigrant (Van der Veer 1997: 100).

Thus Saladin represents the bad Indian, who is forever trying to forget his roots, representing inauthenticity and falsity. 'Chamcha' literally translates as spoon, but idiomatically means "sucking up". Gibreel – as the name suggests – represents the good Indian, whereas Saladin's falsity is considered not only wrong-headed, but even evil (*SV* 257). Gibreel is 'to be considered 'good' by virtue of *wishing to remain...* at bottom an untranslated man' (*SV* 427). His reward for such purity is to develop a halo and turn into the Archangel Gabriel.

> Gibreel... has wished to remain, to a large degree, *continuous* – that is, joined to and arising from his past... his is still a self which... we may

> describe as 'true'... whereas Saladin Chamcha is a creature of *selected* discontinuities, a *willing* re-invention; his *preferred* revolt against history being what makes him... 'false' (*SV* 427).

However, having built up these categories throughout the novel, Rushdie abruptly rejects them: Saladin shows himself to be capable of self-sacrifice when he risks his life to save his former landlords in a fire and then returns to India and makes up with his father from whom he has been estranged for many years. Gibreel meanwhile shows that he is himself capable of evil. This polarizing and eventual rejection of categories makes the point that we must be careful about deluding ourselves in chasing an essentialist or ideal identity that may be the product of myth and longing.

Where Saladin's quest to translate himself goes wrong is in trying to achieve complete assimilation to an idea of Englishness that does not really exist, and that, in so far as it tries to exist, can never include an Asian immigrant. He soon discovers that the England he is in love with, the Gentleman's England, no longer exists (*SV* 270). Even his ultimate attempt to become more English by marrying an Englishwoman with a posh English accent, ironically becomes evidence of his difference, since Pamela marries him *because* he is Indian, in her attempt to betray her class.

Rushdie's emphasis on the metamorphosis and transformation of individuals in *The Satanic Verses* symbolizes the situation of migrants, which is in turn symbolic of the human condition in general; the way in which identities change and are changed when confronted with new situations. The redefinition of identity which applies to migrants concerns not only self-definition but also how they are constructed by others, which is in many cases in racist terms (Van der Veer 1997: 101). Thus immigrants are able to mutate into half-animals – 'businessmen from Nigeria' grow 'sturdy tails', 'holidaymakers from Senegal who were doing no more than changing planes' turn into 'slippery snakes' (*SV* 168). Some men and women have mutated into half-plants, others into 'giant insects, or even, on occasion, built partly of brick or stone' (*SV* 171). The bewildered Chamcha wants to know how it is possible. The reply: 'They describe us... That's all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct' (*SV* 168).

Rushdie's use of the genre of 'magic realism' in order to express the somewhat fantastical experience of the cultural migrant, allows him to blur the boundaries between fantasy and reality, questioning the notion of identity as stable and self-contained, instead pointing to its construction through a complex series of external events. By highlighting the ability of the self 'to be transformed into something that was formerly alien to itself', it both questions the stability of self-identity, and at the same time interrogates the boundary between self and other (Booker 1990: 980). Identities are shown to be constructed, thus difference is not so different. In *Midnight's Children*, for example Saleem is born into a middle-class Muslim comfortable environment, whereas his nemesis Shiva is born into a Hindu family and lives like the majority of Indians in difficult lower-class circumstances (Crane 1992: 181). We find out later that Mary switched the babies at birth, thus further questioning the authenticity of "identity". This strategy of questioning the idea of sustained identity supplies a central theme which runs throughout Rushdie's work, a central point of which is questionable parentage, carried to the extreme in *Shame*, where Omar has three mothers who are sisters, none of whom can really remember who is the "true" mother.

This portrays identity as almost accidental, rather than determined in any deep way. The device of questionable parenthood serves again to question the idea of authentic, pure cultural or religious identities. Boundaries are not fixed, but are fluid and changeable. However, this does not result in a rationalist, individualist picture. What is interesting here is that highlighting the non-essential character of identity does nothing to lessen the strength of these ties. The narrator Saleem writes that:

> when we eventually discovered the crime of Mary Pereira, we all found that it *made no difference*! I was still their son: they remained my parents. In a kind of collective failure of imagination, we learned that we simply could not think our way out of our pasts (*MC* 118).

Similarly, in *The Satanic Verses*, it is only when Saladin returns to his homeland and accepts his heritage – shown even in his return to his given name: he 'had begun to find his full, un-Englished name pleasing for the first time in twenty years' (*SV* 524) – that he finds some peace and contentment.

Therefore, despite the fantastical transformations and translations individuals undergo in Rushdie's novels, identities are not treated as easily changeable or lightly cast off. Rather, in contrast to the rather uncomplicated picture that Waldron draws when he says that we are all cosmopolitans now, with Rushdie we have a sort of agonising and struggling with the complex identity that can be a painful and deeply fragmentary experience. This struggle is explored in *Midnight's Children* with the recurring motif of the "hole" which is tied to the search to become "whole". This theme first makes an entrance at the very beginning of Saleem's narrative. Here Saleem narrates the tale of his grandfather Aadam Aziz, thirty-two years before Saleem's own birth. Aadam returns after five years in Germany to his native Kashmir. As he attempts to pray, he is invaded by images of his Western friends 'scorning' him and 'mocking his prayer with their anti-ideologies'. Aadam attempts to 're-unite himself with an earlier self' which would have ignored these voices by going out to the valley to pray, 'trying, absurdly, to pretend that nothing had changed' – he leans forward in prayer whereupon a tussock of earth 'smote him upon the point of the nose'. The consequence of the event – his loss of faith – is expressed in mythic and surreal terms:

> Three drops fell. There were rubies and diamonds. And my grandfather, lurching upright, made a resolve. Stood. Rolled cheroot. Stared across the lake. And was knocked forever into that middle place, unable to worship a God in whose existence he could not wholly disbelieve. Permanent alteration: a hole (*MC* 12).

The very "real" pain felt at the loss of identity and feeling of being cut off from an authentic indigenous past can be expressed only in comic, mythic and surreal terms (Afzal-Khan 1993: 152). The "whole" identity is replaced by a literal hole which recurs throughout the novel in the form of the perforated sheet. It is through this hole that the doctor Aadam Aziz is asked to examine a female patient in small sections. Aziz never observes the "whole" of Naseem, but begins to fall in love with her in small parts. He comes to think of the perforated sheet as something sacred and magical 'because through it he has seen the things which had filled up the hole inside him' (*MC* 27). Afzal-Khan's explanation here helpfully draws out my themes:

> Dr. Aziz, himself a "fragmented" man, becomes obsessed with the woman whom he sees only in fragmented form, and in his desire to somehow unify these pieces, to possess the whole woman, he decides to marry her.

> Unfortunately, the hole is too insidious—it devours and destroys everyone it touches. Naseem, once she becomes Aadam Aziz's wife, can only internalize the hole and become as embittered and attenuated a person as her husband. Although her response to the loss of selfhood, to the absurdity of existence in a fragmented world, is very different from Aziz's—in that she tries to hang on to any and all traditions that can give her some sense of identity...it is clear that she is in the same dilemma as her husband, as in fact is every character of the novel (Afzal-Khan 1993: 152-3).

The theme of the futility of trying to capture the "whole" is carried throughout the book. One example of this is seen in the figure of Lifafa Das who tries desperately to capture the whole of reality in his peepshow (*MC* 75). For Rushdie, the attempt to encapsulate all parts into a coherent unity is futile:

> human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. Partial beings, in all the senses of that phrase. Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved; perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to the death (*IH* 12).

But this is not just about the fruitlessness of trying to achieve "wholeness", purity, but also concerns the fragility and dangerousness of the dream of wholeness – of notions of authenticity and true identity – that, conversely, we must think in terms of multiples, masses, teeming multitudes, if we are to prevent the cracks from appearing.

That the cracks are always potentially there in this vast country, the people of which are united neither by religion, language, culture or race, is alluded to throughout Rushdie's writing by his use of the metaphor of earthquakes. This is most obviously so in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, where Rushdie's words have a prophetic quality: 'Where the plates of different realities met, there were shudders and rifts. Chasms opened. A man could lose his life' (238). Examples also abound in *Midnight's Children*: for example, members of the Free Islam Convocation, a federation of anti-partition Muslim groups 'played hit-the-spittoon, and ignored the cracks in the earth' (*MC* 47). The threat of fragmentation is never far away: 'The earth was cracking. Dust ate the edges of roads, and on some days huge gaping fissures appeared in the midst of macadamed intersections' (*MC* 39). This points towards the fragility of the "whole". The

metaphorical cracks of course find their most literal and devastating representation in the partition of India and Pakistan.

To conclude this section, despite Rushdie's cosmopolitanism, the state of being in 'that middle place' of translation, being 'carried across' or 'in-between', is not portrayed as easy. Rushdie's writing concerns how we can fill up this 'God-shaped hole' (*IH* 424) and wants to show how abandoning the search for an authentic, comprehensive self can be liberating. With the idea of closure, of a unified whole, for Rushdie comes oppression, a stifling of the imagination, a lack of thinking about how things can be better. In hybridity, fusion of ideas, he sees possibilities for creativity, newness.

2. Suspended between two cultures: Leena Dhingra's *Amritvela*

Rushdie has highlighted above all the sheer complexity of the sources of identity. The migrant or exile, who literally has a fragmented identity, is presented as symbolic of the human condition in general. In contrast to the barrage of "too much-ness" that is Rushdie's style, these themes are interestingly explored in the quiet yet evocative reflections of a solitary migrant in Leena Dhingra's first novel *Amritvela*. Where the technique of Rushdie's postmodernism is to demonstrate the too-muchness, hybridity, multiplicity through the style of writing, Dhingra's novel by contrast explores the experience of hybridity as felt by a sole protagonist. This allows us to relate to the real difficulties faced by the migrant, concerning the status of being a partial member of two worlds but a fully paid-up citizen of neither, which is lost in the circus of Rushdie's writing.

Amritvela means that time of day just before dawn when the sun has risen but cannot yet be seen. The story follows Meera, an Indian woman living in Britain, on a voyage of internal struggle over what she feels to be her divided self, which is ultimately resolved in Meera's realisation that no such opposition exists. The narrative begins with Meera's flight to India; she feels herself 'suspended between two cultures' (1) and wonders whether she is returning home or just visiting. The story of the novel is then Meera's quest to discover who she really is and where she belongs – to find an answer to the repeated question 'What is Me and who am I? Who...am...I?' (128). She has returned to India with the intention of finding her "true" identity: 'to make it all fit and

make me whole' (73). Being back in India has awakened her 'whole feeling of uprootedness and loss', of 'the years of feeling suspended' (37). The final pages see her flying back to Britain, with the realisation that both parts of her identity play an equal part – she cannot choose between the two, but must embrace both.

Thus Meera's story represents the state of the migrant who is left "in-between" worlds, with in a sense nowhere to call home – in the host country they are seen as Other, however, inevitably changed by living away, neither can they be fully at home in "their own" country. Although Meera has lived in Britain since her childhood, she still does not feel at home: 'In London I am a stranger and constantly feel a stranger' (72). Nor however is she fully at home in India. Despite her earnest attempts to dress and behave like a native, she is constantly treated like a visitor. This state of existing in-between is nicely illustrated when, noting the unsuitability of her 'Western' shoes, Meera decides to purchase some authentic Indian chappals (sandels) (44). Even this attempt to do something normal and Indian becomes a struggle over her identity: Her cousin Usha exclaims: ''Chappals! That's easy! Get them at Cottage. [...] That'll be the best place!' She laughs. 'A bit closer to the system you're used to'' (53). The Cottage turns out to be a tourist shop, and even when she goes in search of "authentic" sandels, the irony is that the only chappals that are a comfortable fit on Meera are 'export quality'.

Exploring the multiplicity of identity at the level of the self presents a means through which to question the idea of a cohesive identity on the larger scale: it quickly becomes evident that the romanticised version of "India" Meera believed she was returning to does not really exist. This is given a further dimension in that the old relatives lived in Pakistan pre-partition and the novel is set against the backdrop of a constant narrative image of "Old Lahore".

Meera is told repeatedly that there is no one India, rather there are many Indias. When she is ill Dr Shankar tells her 'there are many Indias, you know!' (153).

> 'You know what I think the trouble is, Bibiji? For me, India has got something to do with being a child. Something to do with feeling loved, protected and belonging. [...] For the child in me it is warm and familiar, and for the grown up that I am, it is a strange land, in which I don't know my way around.' Bibiji listens.

'But now, my parents are no more. The world of my childhood has gone and I can't seem to find what I am looking for.'

Bibiji nods her head in silence. 'Nah, rani,' she starts gently, her voice soothing, 'it doesn't just go. It stays and remains ... but changed and different. Other things get grafted on, but India is all the things you feel it to be, and much else as well ...'(114-5).

It is only through having left that Meera can view her childhood home as a cohesive 'whole' – upon immersion this quickly breaks down into a multiplicity of divergent strands. Meera's view of India is clearly different to what it would have been had she stayed. Just as with Chamcha's 'gentleman's England', Meera quickly discovers that the India she remembers resides in her memory and her dreams of a future cohesive self.

The discomfort over plural identities addressed by Rushdie through the metaphor of the hole in *Midnight's Children* manifests itself in *Amritvela* in physical illness, a common metaphor in literature for a sense of powerlessness or cry for help (Crane 2000: 14). Meera's sense of confusion comes to a head when she is taken by her relations to the Christmas bazaar. Immediately the scene is one of masses – 'teeming colourful confusion' (135). ''Look! This is India!'' exclaims Meera's Aunt, 'savouring the hustle and the colour and the crowds around her' (136). But Meera, who is now a visitor, cannot savour her hectic surroundings and quickly begins to feel unwell: 'I follow, getting dizzier with the noise – in my head impressions and confusions, and around, the loud, pressing crowd' (137). For the next few days Meera suffers with a fever. On regaining consciousness she tells Dr Shankar, who is also a family friend, of her dream. She dreamt that she is walking with her family along a frozen river. She feels included but not that she belonged. Then further down she sees that the river is flowing and that there are many more people there too – among them her husband and daughter, and her late parents (who were émigrés) – and she chooses to walk over to the river that flows. She asks Dr Shankar the meaning of it:

Dr Shankar shakes his head. 'I don't know. But how did you feel?'

'It felt the right thing to do. And I felt right doing it.'

'Then that's good. After all, the natural movement of water is to flow...'

'That's right. So it is! I followed a natural movement! Yes, I'd like to think that I did make that choice... But then again – what did I choose?'

Dr Shankar laughs. Such a refreshing laugh. 'Maybe you walked towards the other Indias.'

'But I walked away – I left the family...'
'You don't have to leave anything – just to include. Like India does, it includes everything.' (155)

Clearly the flowing river is being used here as a metaphor for identity. Again, identity is not in itself a fixed entity but rather, as Meera discovered in her dream, its 'natural movement' is to flow. As was seen with Rushdie's characters, the dream of wholeness, of finding a single authentic self, is once more found to be futile. Meera comes to the realisation that it is only by embracing the plural parts of her identity that she can be whole. She has not to make a choice between her Indian and her British self, but rather to accept that both worlds are part of her identity, as is symbolized in her daughter Maya, who is literally half British and half Indian.

These worlds are not distinct but are overlapping and interact with each other. Hence they can be seen to act in a dialogue with each other. The resulting fusion of horizons, to use Gadamer's term, implies that both worlds are changed as a result. This is symbolized in the journey of Meera, who is the product of both and thus has no choice but to change.

3. Changed perspectives: migration as metaphor and Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*

It is clear from a reading of both authors discussed so far, though in very different ways, that essentialist and absolutist identities are seen to rest on an abstraction or myth. Cultures only appear as cohesive wholes from a vantage point which has become distanced through the reality of displacement. This often presents a painful predicament for the migrant, or indeed the children or grandchildren of migrants, whose image of the "homeland" or the "motherland" is often selective and romanticised. Hanif Kureishi for example writes:

I know Pakistanis and Indians born and brought up here [in Britain] who consider their position to be the result of a diaspora: they are in exile, awaiting return to a better place, where they belong, where they are welcome. And this 'belonging' will be total. This will be home, and peace.
It is not difficult to see how much illusion and falsity there is in this view. How much disappointment and unhappiness might be involved in going 'home' only to see the extent to which you have been formed by England

> and the depth of attachment you feel to the place, despite everything (Kureishi cited in Crane 2000: 4).

Similarly, Rushdie expresses the futility of trying to return to the idea one has of the past:

> It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind (*IH* 10).[16]

On living in the new country, one becomes shaped by it in ways that make it difficult to return to one's homeland. Hence Meera's cousin is warned not to get work experience in England once she'd finished her studies; she is told, '"If you stay on, you'll make little roots and then it's a tearing apart"' (*Amritvela* 50). At the same time, neither is one fully at home in the new country – even if, like Chamcha one does everything to emulate the Englishman, one is forever marked out as different, not least by the colour of one's skin. Thus the immigrant is in this often uncomfortable state of having a foot in both worlds but being a fully-fledged member of neither.

The message both in Rushdie's work and in *Amritvela* is that the only path towards resolving this is by coming to terms with one's plural self. It is only through accepting the in-betweenness of diaspora identity that one is able to cope with the pain and alienation that are the effects of difference, whilst still retaining this difference and resisting the push to erase aspects of one's identity entailed in the process of homogenization (Crane 2000: 4).

Both authors clearly want to use this to point to the fallacy of authentic, pure identity and to demonstrate, to different extents, that this plurality is a feature of identity in

[16] The fact that this is the case raises some important points for the study of multicultural societies to be discussed in the following chapter. The idealised homeland can become a marker against which the host country inevitably falls short (whether or not these are first generation émigrés or British-born who have never been to "their country of origin").

general. For Meera, the dream of a pure India which will make her whole again must make way for the multiplicity which she finds. This is so even in the constant in the novel – the continuity of the elderly ladies and their habits – who display their own hybridity in their dream of Old Lahore. Rushdie's work makes the rejection of authentic identity its very rationale. In *Shame* for example he challenges the idea that we have "roots": 'Look under your feet. You will not find gnarled roots sprouting through the soles. Roots, I sometimes think, are a conservative myth, designed to keep us in our places' (*Shame* 86).

Even within Rushdie's cosmopolitan stance, the picture to emerge is not one of an easy individualism but rather of agonising and struggle with a complex identity which is in contrast with the rather uncomplicated picture presented by Waldron. For Dhingra, it is 'a tearing apart'. As discussed above, in *Midnight's Children* Rushdie uses the metaphor of the hole to explore the very real discomfort that individuals feel at having a plural identity – and the need human beings have for beliefs and values and a sense of "wholeness". Thus hybridity is not taken lightly – his use of mythical realism and comic blurring of boundaries masks the seriousness of what is at issue. In *Shame* he writes that: 'Realism can break a writer's heart' (*Shame* 70). Thus what we see is a complex picture of continuity and change, of rootedness in rootlessness. While these experiences are found in the extreme in the atypical experience of the migrant, the point to be made certainly for Rushdie is that this state of migrancy stands as a metaphor for the human condition in general – a concentrated example of metamorphosis and change that results from interaction with the new.

> The very word *metaphor*, with its roots in the Greek words for *bearing across*, describes a sort of migration, the migration of ideas into images. Migrants—borne-across humans—are metaphorical beings in their very essence; and migration, seen as a metaphor, is everywhere around us. We all cross frontiers; in that sense, we are all migrant peoples (*IH* 278-9).

The point being then that individuals are not confined within a given culture and tradition. Consciousness does not necessarily coincide with "identity" (Bennett 1998: 5). 'We all cross frontiers', we all come into new situations which throw up contrasting commitments in ways which can cause real pain (but which can be a source of creativity, opening the door through which 'newness enters the world').

A wonderful example of the interaction between communities and the conflicting commitments that sometimes result for the individual is found in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*. Seth paints a world which demonstrates the sheer futility of trying to narrowly conceptualise identities, the realities of social life in India being that those of different religion, culture, caste and material status exist in a complex web of interaction and interdependence. This vast novel stands in contrast both to the postmodern magical realism of Rushdie's writing and to the simplicity of Dhingra's narrative. The novel is based around the fictional town of Brahmpur in the years immediately following Independence, and narrates the intricate connections that exist between members of different families, castes, religions and cultures. The novel overflows with strong inter-cultural relationships between the central Muslim and Hindu protagonists, displaying a complex interplay of connection and difference, most movingly in the love affair of Lata and Kabir.

The literature also highlights the fragility of the lines of connection: while some level of consensus or universality exists and must be invoked in order to understand the interaction and multiplicity within India, these connections are shown to lack stability where interaction takes place between those who do not share each others' background understandings of "history". *A Suitable Boy* is based around the time of the first General Election and a central role is given to the importance simply of talking and of debate and democracy. It vividly demonstrates how essentialist understandings, group exclusions, come to the fore when these conditions are abandoned. Seth's account of the riot at Misri Mandi, where the Hindi celebration of Dussehra coincides with the Muslim observance of Moharram, demonstrates how overlapping identities are quickly replaced by simple dualisms.

> Both sides now were filled with the lust to kill – what did it matter if they too suffered martyrdom? – to attack pure evil, to defend what was dear to them – what did it matter if they died? – whether to recreate the passion of Karbala or to re-establish Ram Rajya and rid the world of the murderous, cow-slaughtering, God-defiling devils (*SB* 1152).

What is shocking about this account is that in most of the book what is remarkable is the way in which the lives of people of different religions or "cultures" overlap and

interact. Thus this episode demonstrates how the similarity in difference can be eclipsed by the stirring up of communal feeling, myth, history, stories and so on. Then people are speaking from a whole different background and it is very difficult to reach a fusion of horizons.[17] Above all, a call for tolerance and against religious absolutism, *A Suitable Boy* demonstrates the dialogical construction of identities. Cultural and religious identities which are seen initially to be internally diverse, overlapping and blurred at the edges, are constructed as homogeneous and exclusive, and are asserted in singular ways.

So while the connections or "family resemblances" exist, making communication across "borders" possible, the literature also demonstrates the difficulties that accompany cross-cultural "translation". This is reflected on a personal level in the internal conflict of the main protagonist of the novel, Lata. The central story of the novel is the love story between Lata, a high caste Hindu girl, and Kabir, a Muslim. Lata faces a difficult decision – whether to marry her true love or whether to give in to family pressure and tradition and marry 'a suitable boy'. The decision she faces is a familiar one, retold a million times the world over. Yet in this very ordinary dilemma Lata displays the human capacity for self-reflection.

The novel attests to the existence and power of the inner life of the emotions which suggests that individuals are not confined to their given cultural identities. However, this is balanced against the importance of tradition and cultural background. Ultimately inner freedom is made secondary to the ties of family and tradition, and it is hard to know exactly what to make of the ending. The powerful hold of tradition and community triumphs when Lata's choice of 'a suitable boy' over her true love Kabir is essentially presented as a happy ending. From Lata's point of view it is ultimately a happy ending despite her 'going against her heart' as we might say in our society. Seth seems to suggest that for Lata to choose otherwise would be to embark on a course to madness (Almond 2004). Haresh, the 'suitable boy' is represented as successful, energetic, 'independent of his family (though affectionate towards them)' and as taking 'great care with his appearance' (*SB* 603). Kabir by contrast has a history of madness in his family, and is solitary and serious. For Seth, the ties between individual and culture

[17] What is meant by this term and how it encapsulates understandings within and between cultures is explored in the following chapter.

run deep; what is the right thing to do is intricately bound up with one's traditions and so on. Here Seth is seen to be more historicist and less cosmopolitan than Rushdie: the ending for Lata only appears unhappy if judged from an individualist standpoint – for Lata and her mother, in the context of the culture and social system of which the Mehras are a part, it is the best choice.

4. Culture and identity in the Anglo-Indian literature and its implications for political theory

The "hybridity" of identity, which has been presented as the condition of the everyday and not just the atypical domain of the émigré or exile, has important implications for the discussion of multiculturalism. What is highlighted by the Anglo-Indian literature is the moral complexity of individual lives, and the plurality of the sources of identity. The framework against which individuals understand the world is never fixed. Whilst the horizons for our thinking might be given by our particular cultural background, at times we are thrown into circumstances which cause us to reflect beyond these frameworks or which extend these horizons. The protagonists of the novels discussed face new circumstances in which they cannot remain the same. This state of being a migrant, in Rushdie's sense, brings us into situations which force us to think outside our immediate communities. Clearly, one does not need to cross physical borders for this to be the case. The self is not one-dimensional, but is made up of multiple aspects, some of which may transcend one's cultural group. Meera for example is not only a Hindu, but is also British, Indian, a woman, a mother and so on. And membership of these will throw up contrasting commitments in ways that can be painful. These conflicting influences can generate reflection on the way things are done in one's own culture. It is no coincidence that the most traditionalist of societies are also the most closed, a deliberate policy to ward off any influences that might conflict with the cultural and/or religious code.

The literature highlights the intricate social web of which individuals are a part and in which they make sense of their lives. Cross-cultural translation is shown to be possible, but, as is highlighted in *A Suitable Boy*, it lacks the stability of communication that might exist where the cultural horizon is shared to a greater degree. Though capable of crossing borders, individuals have deep attachments which are underestimated in the

abstract individualistic view. Even Rushdie, though far more resolutely cosmopolitan than Seth, recognises the importance of our "cultural baggage". He writes that the reason why in *Midnight's Children*, there is so much space given to what happens to Saleem before he is born is to say:

> 'We do not come naked into the world.' We bring with us an enormous amount of baggage, so therefore, limitation. And that baggage is history, family history and a broader history too, and we're born into a context, and we're born as the child of our parents, and as the descendant of our family, and as the people who live in a certain house, and there's a lot of stuff which is just given – which is not just ours to make. And in order to understand 'us', you have to understand that other stuff (Rushdie 2003: 17).

Therefore Rushdie's postmodern celebration of newness and hybridity – of 'mongrelization' and 'too-muchness' – does not fail to take identity seriously, but rather, takes it very seriously indeed. It can be seen as essentially pragmatic: this is the fragmented world in which we live – thus we had best learn to live with this plurality rather than lament a mythical past.

Cultural hybridity is used, certainly in Rushdie, and in a more subtle way in Seth, as transformative, as a way of opening up the space through which "newness enters the world". Rushdie's use of myth to expose the way in which cultural identities are based on *ideas* highlights how change is within our power: if nothing is set in stone, nothing is so because it is 'in its very essence'. If identities are based on ideas, and ideas can be re-imagined, then the world can potentially become a more inclusive place. At a more subtle level, Seth is, like Rushdie, dealing with the question of how newness comes into being. He contrasts the old with the new: strong 'modern' characters like Malati and Kuku of the new generation contrast with the Mrs Rupa Mehra and Mrs Mahesh Kapoor of the traditional breed.

The portrayal of identity in the Anglo-Indian literature backs up the point made in the previous chapter, that 'identity' can be used in constraining ways. Even when the actions of individuals fall within the bounds of "their" tradition, it does not necessarily signify a similar confinement of thought. Given the complexity of culture and identity, making particular identities the starting point for politics can involve drawing lines in essentialising and excluding ways, which can play to the agenda of those interested in

asserting their versions as authentic. The notion of cultural hybridity as it is found in the literature is useful for the discussion of my thesis, since it can be seen as representing the extreme end of the spectrum that is the common experience of us all. Even within a single culture there are different conceptions of it, different claims to what is authentic and valuable, which can require a complex ongoing repositioning of oneself and one's identity.[18]

India provides a vivid example of the criss-crossing overlaps and interaction between cultures, and internal diversity within them. The portrayal of the multiplicity of identity creates a picture of India of which it makes little sense to speak of in terms of disparate and unified groups. In its various forms, the Anglo-Indian literature is insisting that translation can take place. Purely communitarian, local terms fail to describe what is happening when individuals are thrown into situations which force them to think critically beyond their 'given' terms of reference. The great poet and writer Rabindranath Tagore wrote that the very 'idea of India' militates 'against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one's own people from others' (Tagore cited in Sen 2005: 118). The literature portrays the interaction and interconnectedness between the many diverse cultures and religions both within India and beyond its borders, including both the vast Indian diaspora, and its history with colonial Britain. 'Ideas as well as people have moved across India's borders over thousands of years', a multi-way interaction which has enriched India as well as the rest of the world (Sen 2005: 86). The connectedness which characterises India almost as much as its diversity, and has found its expression in the success of democracy and a unified and inclusive, though highly contested, idea of India, makes no sense unless we invoke the language of thin universalism.

This is not a connectedness that transcends particularity, and appeals to an abstract universalism that is "out there". Rather it has evolved over centuries through the

[18] Peter Van Der Veer contends that in the valorising of hybridity and the power and creativity of the inbetween in the literature of cultural studies, 'much is clearly expected from living on the margins of society, from migrants who are nomads and who refuse both nostalgia and the comforts of assimilation, who are actively, creatively 'in-between''. This notion 'of almost total innovation, of new subject-formation in 'in-between' sites, inhabited by migrants as pioneer settlers' seems to invoke 'the traditional romantic trope of the 'self-made individual' who invents himself in the marginality of the American frontier' (Van der Veer 1997: 94-95).

interaction of groups and the long tradition of tolerance within India. A universalist understanding of India finds its philosophical justification in many diverse sources from within all religions, including the modern writings of Gandhi, Tagore, and Nehru, as well as the Muslim emperor Akbar who reigned from 1556 to 1605, and the third century BCE Buddhist emperor Ashoka.[19] Thus India itself might be understood to embody an (uneasy) 'fusion of horizons'. This is not to say that this plural notion is not deeply challenged, but even where this is the case, this to a large extent takes place within the framework of democracy and the rules of discourse; for example, the BJP's efforts to forge a Hindu India are largely channelled through the democratic political system.

The Anglo-Indian literature calls for plural descriptions of India which do not try to encompass it within a singular picture. The literature illustrates that it is when we try to encompass these into a whole that the cracks appear. Conversely, the way to prevent fragmentation is not to try to contain all the pieces in a unified whole, but rather to give room to this plurality. Present reality must be allowed to contain multiple descriptions of identity existing side by side. Clearly this is the message as regarding India: the space must be maintained in which a plurality of descriptions can coexist, and in which descriptions that claim to be the authoritative version of what is an "Indian" can be challenged. This requires engagement with the particular, as Clifford Geertz observes:

> If the general is to be grasped at all, and new unities uncovered, it must, it seems, be grasped not directly, all at once, but via instances, differences, variations, particulars—piecemeal, case by case. In a splintered world, we must address the splinters (Geertz 2000: 221).

Wittgenstein's model of family resemblances might be aptly invoked to conceptualise cultures as they are portrayed in the Indian context through the literature. In reference to Wittgenstein's metaphor, Sunil Khilnani writes that members of different communities who share a territorial space can be 'at once distinct and [share] a family resemblance' (Khilnani 1997: 170). While the different cultures within India bear similarities to each other, there is not one single essence that runs throughout that might be identified as "Indianness". The common "Indianness" shared by Indians lies in a

[19] For a fascinating discussion of these see Amartya Sen's *The Argumentative Indian* (2005).

network of similarities which are overlapping and criss-crossing, not in one essence that is shared by all.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the picture of culture and identity that we get from a study of Anglo-Indian literature is one which above all stresses its sheer complexity, and the dangerous simplifications that are involved in attempts to tie the borders of cultures and nations to ideas of authentic identity. While borders are portrayed as constructed and maintained through the imagination, at the same time, the transgression of these is portrayed as a potentially painful experience. The literature suggests we are at once deeply tied to the sources of our identities, and capable of reflection beyond our immediate cultural boundaries. The complexity of identity is symbolized in the example of the migrant who, in being caught in the "inbetween" space between identities and standing at the margins of multiple cultures, provides a metaphor for the human condition more widely. While this insists on the possibilities for cross-cultural dialogue, the picture is not that of freely choosing bits of this culture and bits of that as Waldron would have it, but rather one of rootedness in rootlessness; of struggles over one's identity as involving a "tearing apart" or as leaving a hole which it is not easily filled.

CHAPTER 3

Distance and connection: the "fusion of horizons" and the approach of "world travelling"

Introduction

In the previous chapters I have emphasised the difficulties which can attend the formal recognition of collective identities. In this chapter however I intend to develop the argument that a certain kind of recognition is necessary if we are to meet the challenges that diversity and cross-cultural interaction throw up. I argue that a form of recognition that emphasises the fluidity of horizons need not be incompatible with a commitment to normative values, and that universal values are more likely to be realised through a contextual dialogical approach than one which takes an abstract universalist position.

This chapter explores two approaches which insist that we pay attention to the historicity of self and other as a condition of understanding, Gadamer's hermeneutic position and the feminist "world travelling" method. Recognition of our 'distance', that is, our situatedness within different (though overlapping) horizons, is conversely seen as necessary to promoting 'connection' between us. This connection takes the form of a fusion of horizons or dialogue that "travels" between "worlds". It is contended that these positions offer a way of thinking about the "other" that is transformative whilst recognising continuity of tradition, and which takes difference seriously without essentialising it and artificially restricting cultural change. Whilst aiming to grasp cultural meaning from within, Gadamer's hermeneutics and the world travelling approach are also concerned to find critical resources both within particular horizons and through interaction between horizons. They therefore hold the potential for multicultural understanding without abandoning the option of cultural critique (Kidder 1997: 1191). In this way the positions discussed provide a way of overcoming the dichotomy between the universal and the particular; in which the universal is not seen as opposed to, but rather is mediated through, the particular.

The focus of my examples will be on cases primarily concerning women and girls, since it is them who usually stand to lose most in an abandonment of a universal account of human flourishing.[20] The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section aims to demonstrate how approaching inter-cultural evaluations through abstract universal standards can lead to the essentialising and simplifying of the other culture. In particular, it can lead to a distorted view of women as victims of culture rather than as social actors in their own right. Lack of contextual engagement can obscure the complex challenges to dominant interpretations within cultures made by women who at once resist aspects of their culture or religion and define themselves by it. The argument is not however that a universalist approach should be replaced by acceptance of the descriptions of the other, which would tie justice to the borders of cultures in ways that are highly problematic. Thus the problem is set up as that of finding a balance between, on the one hand, responding to the other in her own context and avoiding projecting our own standards and meanings, and on the other, avoiding the cultural relativism implicit in a position which defers to the other's terms.

How this might be resolved is the subject of the following sections. The second section explores Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic argument that it is an ontological condition of understanding that that which is interpreted, and that which interprets occupy their own places in the world. Gadamer rejects what he sees as the Enlightenment view that reason and tradition are opposed, maintaining that this fails to realise the historical rootedness of human understanding. For the purposes of cross-cultural understanding, Gadamer's hermeneutic position can be taken in a general way to call for awareness of our own historically situated horizon, and that of the other. These horizons do not remain distinct, rather, understanding involves the formation of a "fusion of horizons" between self and other in which both parties' outlooks can expect to be changed in an ongoing process of interpretation and revision. Thus while Gadamer's position militates against the existence of transcendental universal principles, it is argued that the threat of relativism is averted through the notion of a

[20] This claim will be addressed in chapter 6.

"fusion of horizons", which provides a basis for a concrete cross-cultural universalism.

Section 3 introduces the approach of "world travelling", developed by Mary Lugones and Isabelle Gunning. This argues for a complex vision of interconnectedness and difference. Assuming that other women are "like us" and suffer the same kinds of oppression involves an "arrogant perception" which, rather than accentuating our connections, leads to distance but dependence. Instead, our starting point in responding to cross-cultural issues must be an acknowledgement of the different contexts from which we speak. Practices and traditions can only be properly understood within their own cultural and historical context. Gunning outlines three steps to successful multicultural dialogue: in seeking to understand the "other", we must, firstly, also look to our own historical context, secondly, we must seek to understand how we as external critics are perceived by the other and thirdly, we must recognise the complexities of the life and circumstances of the other woman. This is illustrated through a discussion of the practice of female genital surgeries.[21]

Since the objective in cross-cultural dialogue is not simply to gain a deeper understanding of each other, but also to make critical judgements, the final section of the chapter addresses the concern that the contextual approach results in a conservative ethics by drawing out the transformative potential of the fusion of horizons or world-travelling approach.

1. The language of cross-cultural evaluation

Charles Taylor writes that '[t]he great challenge of this century... is that of understanding the other' (Taylor 2002: 279). As argued in the previous chapter, individuals are not trapped within static culturally-given horizons; we are all (potentially) migrants of the mind. The overlapping context in which cultures exist insists on the possibilities for cross-cultural translation and communication. However, the logical fact of translation does not do as much work as universalist liberal theorists would suppose. As Taylor puts it, 'what we suffer from in our encounters between peoples are the jackals and vultures of partial and (we hope) surmountable

[21] To use Gunning's term, discussed below.

noncommunication' (Taylor 2002: 291). Thus while the thesis of cultural determinism does not stand up, we still need to attend to the actual, historically situated horizon from which agents think and speak.

The focus of this section is on how failing to attend to the particular context from which the other speaks can lead to miscommunication and ethnocentrism. However, while this demonstrates the need for a contextual approach to cross-cultural matters which tries to understand meanings as they are meanings for the other, this does not entail a simple acceptance of the others' descriptions.

Approaching the interpretation of "other" women from an external standpoint, armed with our own expectations of meanings, can discursively present other women as a homogeneous and undifferentiated group 'leading truncated lives, [and] victimized by the combined weight of their traditions, cultures, and beliefs, and "our" (Eurocentric) history' (Mohanty 2003: 192). This is illustrated by Uma Narayan in *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism*. Narayan highlights some of the factors that shape and distort understandings of issues when they "cross borders" in the context of "third-world" and "Western" women.[22] She argues that a lack of close contextual engagement leads the external critic to impose unity on traditions and cultures where there formerly was none. Failing to be sufficiently attentive to context can lead to treating practices as "cultural" whilst failing to see the complexity of tradition formations and the contestation over claims of the centrality of a practice to the culture. Assessing "other" cultures by Western standards can thus obscure the complexity of cultures and create the impression that other women are oppressed "victims" of their cultures (Narayan 1997: 61-5).

The literature on the practice of *sati*, the immolation of wives on their husband's funeral pyre, illustrates this imposed unity. Narayan argues that *sati* is an example of how so-called "authentic indigenous traditions" can be *invented* under the guise of being *discovered* (Narayan 1997: 64). She suggests that *sati* was constituted as an "Indian tradition" in the process of British colonialists' investigations into it (Narayan

[22] Narayan notes her apprehension at using these terms. Using such labels as "Western" and "third-world women" is dangerously essentialising and invokes a problematic contrast between on the one hand, educated, rich, white women and on the other, uneducated, poor, black women (Narayan 1997: 14).

1997: 61-5). Horrified by the practice, the colonisers looked to religious texts to find out whether it had religious sanction, thus making irrelevant the actual attitudes towards *sati* across various castes and segments of the Hindu community. This raised problems with regards to what counted as religious texts, many of which were reinterpretations of elements of earlier texts, as well as to how they were interpreted. For example, in the *Rig Veda*, which dated from around the second millennium B.C., there was reference to a ceremony in which the widow lay on her husband's funeral pyre before it was lit, and was raised from it by a male relative of the husband. The text endorsed *niyoga*, the marriage of the widow to her husband's brother. However, despite this, this reference was reinterpreted in the sixteenth century as "Vedic sanction" for *sati* (Narayan 1997: 62). In this debate over its status as a tradition, *sati* came to acquire, for both British and Indians, an emblematic status.[23]

Narayan criticises the failure of many feminists to place cultural "traditions" into a historical frame, and the tendency to lump together differently viewed practices in the same lot, for example, *sati* and dowry-murder. Discussing all such practices as instances of "traditional practices that afflict contemporary Indian women" confuses a historical "traditional practice" that has virtually disappeared with the more recent phenomenon of dowry-murders which has arisen in the course of modernization and social change and is not endorsed by "tradition" (Narayan 1997: 48).[24] The lack of contextual explanation for practices such as these renders them as 'mysterious and arbitrary practices that [seem] to "happen" to Indian women as a result of "Indian culture"' (Narayan 1997: 85). This can be seen as part of an

> ongoing practice of "blaming culture" for problems in Third-World contexts and communities, a practice that sharply contrasts with "noncultural" accounts of problems where mainstream Western subjects bear culpability (Naryan 1997: 51).

For example, Narayan highlights the asymmetry in the treatment of violence against women in Western and "Other" contexts. She is struck by the focus on deadly cases of

[23] What parts of a culture or religion are focused on or presented as central can serve the interests of those both within and outside cultures. For example, Joseph Carens notes that the fact that during primary and secondary school the only thing he ever learned about India concerned *sati* was not accidental, but served to identify the British with civilization and Indians with barbarism and thus to legitimate British colonialism (Carens 2000: 40).

[24] See Narayan 1997, p85, for examples of this confusion.

domestic violence in the Indian context which has given massive visibility to the category of dowry-murder and by contrast the *lack* of focus on deaths resulting from domestic violence in the U.S. context (Narayan 1997: 90). Moreover, deaths in the Indian context are not seen as forms of domestic violence, but are rather given "cultural explanations". Yet dowry-murder is not a cultural practice, but is a fairly recent phenomenon, with largely economic motivations. Narayan contends that all this leads to the perception of women as suffering "death by culture" which feeds into the wider perception held by Western feminists of women of "Other" cultures as "victims of their culture".

The effect of focussing on practices such as *sati* and dowry murder, and treating them together as instances of the "burning of brides and widows" serves to exoticize women from different cultures. Treating practices such as dowry-murder, *sati* and female genital mutilation without attending to the traditions of contestation and resistance that surround them, serves to convey an impression of the "Duration" of practices without any attention to "Change" (Narayan 1997: 48). Narayan terms this an "erasing of history" which helps reinforce problematic pictures in the Western colonial mode of seeing Third-World countries as "places without history" and "places suffused by Unchanging Religious Worldviews" (Narayan 1997: 52-3). Third-World contexts are represented as:

> uniform and monolithic spaces, with no important internal cultural differentiations, complexities, and variations. While Western contexts are represented both as spaces of historical change and internal complexity, Third-World contexts tend to be portrayed as places where "time stands still" and where "one culture rules all" (Narayan 1997: 50).

All this helps create and perpetuate the attitude of us and them – the "us" being civilised, rational, enlightened and free, and the "them" being superstitious, tradition-bound, un-changing and oppressed.

In sum, failing to look for close contextual engagement can thus misrepresent meanings as they appear to the agents involved. This is important for my discussion since it shows how a failure to contextualise practices can help present cultures in terms of static and unchanging traditions, in which women are seen as victims of

oppressive cultures rather than as agents involved in the interpreting and challenging of aspects of their culture. "Other" cultures are viewed in "particular" terms and effectively placed in tension with universalism, rather than as sites in which the universal is played out (this point is to be developed in chapter 6). Imposing "universal" standards from an external viewpoint ignores indigenous efforts of reform and resistance and can be alienating and counter-productive in its effect. Lack of attention to contextual variations can lead to what Marnia Lazreg calls "a ritual" in Western scholarship on Third-World women of appealing to religions 'as *the* cause of gender inequality' (Lazreg cited in Narayan 1997: 52). This makes it difficult for women within cultures who are critical of their religions and seek to change them, but who nonetheless see themselves as deeply religious. Furthermore, this effectively reinforces the interpretations of practices and traditions as held by traditionalist men within cultures, reinforcing the difficulties of women within cultures in their attempts to change it. It lends weight to the fundamentalist's interpretation of traditions which claim to define women's "authentic" place within their culture, and which paint disagreement over these norms as "Westernization" (Narayan 1997: 53).

An example which shows the importance of engaging with meanings as they are meanings for the agents involved is that of Muslim women wearing the veil. This issue has been brought to the fore recently in Britain through comments made by government minister Jack Straw and a case in which a schoolteacher was banned from wearing a veil when teaching. To the non-Muslim community, the issue of veiling is framed primarily in terms of security and the oppression of women. The wearing of the veil is portrayed by many feminists as symbolizing the subjection of women within Islam. For example, speaking in the context of the French *l'affaire foulard*, Katha Pollitt suggests that the veil be banned so that parents cannot force their daughters to wear it (Pollitt 1999: 30). While it undoubtedly can be used to oppress women and girls, interpreting it solely in these terms with no reference to Muslim women's own interpretations, casts its meanings purely in patriarchal terms. Once we engage with the voices of women who wear it, it becomes clear that there are numerous motivations behind wearing the veil (as well as numerous versions of the veil itself). For example, Irshad Manji describes a Muslim woman she met in Canada, who understands wearing the veil as an expression of her autonomy:

> A lawyer at the Department of Justice, she'd immigrated to the West in order to practise her faith more meaningfully. For her, that means choosing to wear the hijab – a choice blessed in North America but not her native Tunisia, which has outlawed headscarves in public as part of an effort to 'modernise' (Manji 2003: 190).

Many Muslim women see veiling as an empowering practice. In the case of the French controversy in which girls disobeyed the ban over the wearing of headscarves at school, the motivations are complex. Benhabib suggests that this can neither be taken to signify the oppression of the girls, nor was it a straightforward matter of expression of freedom of religion but rather that it signified a complex act of identification and defiance (Benhabib 2002: 96). Other explanations cast the veil as a symbol of resistance to the commodification of women's bodies in the popular media, and to the hegemony of Western values more generally. It allows women freedom of movement and control of their bodies, protecting them from the male gaze and sexual harassment on public transportation and allowing them to become autonomous subjects. It enables women to move comfortably from the familiar settings of their rural homes to the alien and uncomfortable urban world (Mahmood 2001: 209, Honig 1999: 37).

From a feminist perspective it might appear that some of these explanations merely allow the continuation of inequalities, and absolve men from the responsibility of having to control their behaviour. While this might well be the case, the accounts briefly discussed indicate the complexity over interpretations of oppression and challenge the "external" view which sees these as signifying only domination. The purposes of the veil are not homogenous but are changing and contested; the veil presents an example of a tradition in transition, which can include a return to earlier, though modified, interpretations. For instance, women and girls in the West who wear the *burqa*, which covers the entire body including the head and face, often come from families in which the mothers and grandmothers do not wear it. Versions of head cover as worn by young women, particularly in the West, can be seen as 'very much the product of late twentieth century':

> It is a reconstructed emblem that allows them to combine jeans and jackets and the latest style in kitten heel shoes with the new tradition of the *hijab*...The clothes worn by the new *mohajabehs* are very distinct and

> different from that of their mothers and earlier generations of women in their kind groups. Far from an indication of submission or docility the decision to wear the *hijab* makes a public statement that places the *mohajabehs* in the full light of the public gaze; something the parents and kin groups do not necessarily wish to see (Afshar 2005: 278).

We should not class these practices as "oppressive" without thoroughly attending to the meanings held by the women themselves. As Benhabib notes, feminists should have 'more faith in the capacity of ordinary political actors to renegotiate their own narratives of identity and difference' (Benhabib 2002: 104). Feminist defenders of the transformative potential of the veil writing in the west tend to focus on it as an expression of autonomy (for instance, Benhabib). However there is a sense in which explanations which appeal to the complex expression of autonomy still fit very easily into the categories held by the "Western" defender of women's rights. Ideas 'of female modesty or piety as Islamic virtues' receive scant attention in Western feminist explanations of veiling, and it is precisely in these terms that most Muslim women would explain their decision to take up wearing the veil (Mahmood 2001: 209). Mahmood suggests that 'what is often made to stand in for "real motivations" are those authorized by the analyst's categories', (such as social protest or economic necessity), 'while terms like morality, divinity, and virtue are accorded the status of the phantom imaginings of the hegemonized' (Mahmood 2001: 209).

This reflects the tendency to view our own ways of acting and thinking as the only conceivable ones (Taylor 1985: 129). Western categories of understanding which privilege the scientific view and see other forms of knowledge as inferior can easily interpret other, perhaps more spiritual, ways of living as at a lesser point on the same continuum towards modernity rather than as different but equally valid ways of looking at the world.[25] In achieving cross-cultural understanding it is necessary to overcome simplistic assumptions which tie progress to the west, and to recognise in a real sense that there are different ways of being; that:

> the terms people use to organize their lives are not simply a gloss over universally shared assumptions about the world and one's place in it, but are

[25] However, at the same time, we must be careful to avoid essentialising "western" and "non-western" voices in ways that reinforce the view that Western civilization is somehow the main, and perhaps only, source of rationality and reasoning (Sen 2005: 285).

> actually constitutive at times of very different forms of personhood, knowledge, and experience (Mahmood 2001: 209).

From the discussion in this section, we can conclude that an abstract universal approach can effectively pose obstacles to cross-cultural understanding. If we are to reach understanding, we must begin by attempting to reconstruct meanings as they appear to cultural agents. A universal approach can conversely lead to increased distance. Narayan writes that what she calls "colonialist representation" by Western feminists 'poses an obstacle to the urgent need for feminists to form "communities of resistance" across boundaries of class, race, ethnicity, and national background' (Narayan 1997: 45). Thus she contends that it is necessary to explicitly take account of complexity and difference in order to bring out our connectedness.

The emphasis so far may have given the impression that we must 'suspend' judgement and our critical faculties in order to appreciate and adopt the rationality of the cultures in which the subject we wish to comprehend resides. However, this is not my point. The recognition that we need to get beyond our own terms if we are to reach understanding should not be replaced by an account which simply accepts the descriptions of the other. Relying on the fact that traditions are in flux, and might be constructed in new and transformative ways is no safeguard for justice, for cultural change does not always happily coincide with the interests of women (or others). As I have argued in my previous chapters, since cultures are characterised by internal multiplicity and fluidity, it is crucial to interrogate exactly to whose terms, whose traditions, we are deferring in projects of cultural sensitivity (Nussbaum 1999: 37). In short, there is still the need for universal standards of judgment.

The thesis that understanding the agent involves adopting her point of view, using her own terms or those of her society and time, to describe and account for what she does, is associated with Peter Winch (Taylor 1985: 117). However, Taylor notes that simply recovering the self-description of agents might not be enough since actors might be confused, misinformed or have contradictory purposes (Taylor 1985: 117). This might especially be so in the case of women, since women's oppression is often internalised and presented as authentic and natural, and since women are themselves often the perpetrators of violence against women. Furthermore, their subjection often relegates them to the private sphere preventing them from participating in the very realm in

which they could try to change their predicament (these points will be discussed in depth in chapter 6).

Therefore, the issue might be set up as that of how to strike a delicate balance between neither describing traditions and practices solely through "our" terms nor solely in "their" terms. As Taylor contends:

> making sense of agents does require that we *understand* their self-descriptions. We may, indeed often must, take account of their confusion, malinformation, illusion; but we make sense of them if we grasp *both* how they see things *and* what is wrong, lacunary, contradictory in this (Taylor 1985: 118).

The question then can be phrased as how to approach cross-cultural evaluation without either "erasing" difference by assimilating it to our own categories of understanding or unproblematically adopting the point of view of the other (if the latter were even possible).[26] Or in Taylor's words, 'we need some way of picking out the systematic differences in construal between two different cultures, without either reifying them or branding them as ineradicable' (Taylor 2002: 292).

I now turn to exploring Hans Georg Gadamer's fusion of horizons as a way forward here. For Gadamer, it is an ontological condition of understanding that the interpreter and the object to be interpreted are situated within their own historical horizons. I argue that the notion of a fusion of these horizons allows for awareness of the ways in which we are historically and culturally situated without compromising on the capacity for universal criticism. As such, it allows us to pave a way beyond the 'tired dichotomy' of relativism and universalism.

[26] Taylor calls the view that sees interpretation as adopting the agent's point of view 'the incorrigibility thesis' because, 'in requiring that we explain each culture or society in its own terms, it rules out an account which shows them up as wrong, confused or deluded. Each culture on this view is incorrigible' (Taylor 1985: 123). He denies that we are committed either to accepting incorrigibility of cultures on the one hand, or a position of ethnocentricity on the other. Instead he favours a language of 'perspicuous contrast'. In this language we would be able to formulate both our way of life and that of the other as alternative human variations '*in relation to some human constants at work in both*' both of which might be challenged (Taylor 1985: 125, italics added in order to highlight the thin universalism at work in this view).

2. Gadamer's hermeneutical approach

Hermeneutics is concerned with the art of understanding. Where it was originally concerned with the interpretation of biblical texts, understood more broadly it refers to anything capable of being interpreted, including artefacts, non verbal, written and unwritten communication. The importance of Gadamer's hermeneutics is that he emphasises that there is no 'it' to be interpreted independently of the interpretation. The interpretation and what is interpreted are inseparable. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer argues that all understanding is already interpretation. When we try to understand something, we cannot leave our own prejudices aside. The notion of prejudices (or pre-judgements) is used in a non-pejorative sense to describe the assumptions and expectations and indiscernible habits of thought which provide our initial orientation to that which we are trying to understand. These preconceptions are shaped by our embeddedness in particular historical and cultural traditions of thinking. We come to an interpretation of the object always from within our own particular horizon and partial outlook. In this sense, all interpretation is prejudiced in that it is always oriented to our present concerns (Gadamer 1989).

The common sense view of interpretation would be that to gain objectivity, the interpreter must seek to leave his or her own concepts aside and think only in the concepts of the object to be understood. For Gadamer however, this is a 'naïve illusion'. This is not simply because it is impossible, since the interpreter cannot '[leave] himself aside', for this would still mean it was a legitimate ideal to try to achieve as far as possible (Gadamer 1989: 396). For Gadamer, to 'try to escape from one's own concepts in interpretation is not only impossible, but manifestly absurd. To interpret means precisely to bring one's own preconceptions into play so that the text's meaning can really be made to speak for us' (Gadamer 1989: 397). Failing to take account of the assumptions that we bring to interpretation leaves us unable to see the way we project them onto the thing we are trying to understand.

Gadamer illustrates this through the example of the historian who chooses the concepts through which he describes the historical nature of the object according to his own interest in the material. In doing so, he:

> takes no account of the fact that the descriptive concepts he chooses can be highly detrimental to his proper purpose if they assimilate what is historically different to what is familiar and thus, despite all impartiality, subordinate the alien being of the object to his own preconceptions. Thus, despite his scientific method, he behaves just like everyone else—as a child of his time who is unquestioningly dominated by the concepts and prejudices of his own age (Gadamer 1989: 396).

There is no understanding which is not situated in a historical context. However, rather than closing off the possibilities for understanding, our prejudices (what he calls our fore-structure of understanding following Heidegger (Gadamer 1989: 265)) are what allows us to understand that which is to be understood. The achievement of understanding involves a dialogue between our own self-understanding and that which we seek to understand. It always involves mediating between one's own thinking and that of the object one attempts to understand (Gadamer 1989: 397). Our prejudices are both what opens us up to the matter at issue, and in doing so, are brought to a level of conscious awareness so that they themselves can become the focus of questioning and revision.

Acquiring a horizon of interpretation necessitates the forging of a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer 1989: 397). This is not a matter of forgetting our own horizon of meanings and trying to put ourselves in the position of the other; rather it means the creation of a third horizon, merging or fusing our own horizons with the horizons of the other (Outhwaite 1985: 25). As we encounter others, understanding is seen as a matter of negotiation in which, in successful conversation, both parties reach a new understanding and are thus 'bound to one another in a new community'. It is a transformation 'into a communion, in which we do not remain what we were' (Gadamer 1989: 379). Thus understanding creates a new context of meaning in which the self and that which we are trying to understand are integrated in a way in which neither remains unchanged: '[t]ransposing ourselves...always involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other' (Gadamer 1989: 305).

A key task in the bringing of our cultural assumptions to conscious awareness is that of self-study. One must look to one's own history in order to try and grasp 'what kinds of questions, what habits of rational justification, what sorts of spontaneous

attitudes towards political authority' we might bring to our investigations of different cultures (Kidder 1997: 1195). This task of self-interpretation is on-going, and my own horizons must be constantly re-interrogated in the light of what I learn through interpretation of the other. The initial meanings that we project onto the object of study that arise from our particular expectations are constantly revised as rival meanings emerge from the text. This backwards and forwards process between the meanings projected by self and other is the 'constant task of understanding' (Gadamer 1989: 267). There are no shortcuts to reaching understanding. Never 'should I jump to the conclusion that some deep experience of empathy, or the application of some abstract universal is going to allow me to take short cuts' (Gadamer 1989: 305). While some level of objectivity is obtainable through the backwards and forwards 'movement of understanding and interpretation', this lies only in so far as our fore-meanings and initial assumptions are either 'confirmed "by the things" themselves', or shown to be arbitrary (Gadamer 1989: 267). Understanding therefore requires patient attention to the concrete context of the other's horizon, and cannot appeal to abstract, previously worked-out universal standards.

Gadamer's view of understanding must be situated within his wider view that human and linguistic experience are inextricable. He denies the possibility of knowing the 'world in itself,' as if there is a 'right view' to be found 'from some possible position outside the human, linguistic world' (Gadamer 1989: 447). Moral principles are not abstract but are embodied in the horizon of our traditions that constitute our ethical community (Benhabib 1997: 135). Gadamer is clear that his theory of hermeneutics is not intended to be a procedure or method of understanding, but rather its task is to clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place. For Gadamer, the fusion of horizons is what happens to us each and every time we achieve an understanding. It is an ontological and unalterable condition of understanding, and not a method. The interpreter 'cannot separate in advance the productive prejudices that enable understanding from the prejudices that hinder it and lead to misunderstandings' (Gadamer 1989: 295).

It is our situatedness in the world that both enables us to understand the object of our understanding, and which means we can never leave aside our prejudices. All

hermeneutic activity is triggered by our 'hermeneutic condition', which is described as our 'belonging to a tradition' (Gadamer 1989: 290).

Gadamer's ontological privileging of perspective and tradition as the ground of understanding has led him to be charged with conservatism. The Kantian criticism is that we need some principles for distinguishing between traditions that are and are not worth preserving (Benhabib 1997: 135). However, he is clear that, although we can never obtain complete objectivity, this does not mean that we are imprisoned within our horizons. Gadamer's view of horizons is that they are not fixed and unchanging, but rather, that they move with us.

> Just as the individual is never simply an individual, because he is always in understanding with others, so too the closed horizon that is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction. The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving (Gadamer 1989: 304).

The activity of dialogue is not static, in which parties keep their meanings unchanged, rather meanings are changed in the process. Understanding is always more than merely re-creating someone else's meaning. Questioning opens up new possibilities of meaning, and thus what is meaningful passes into one's own thinking on the subject (Gadamer 1989: 375). Understanding construed as a fusion of horizons is an ongoing process, never finally completed, in which neither our own nor the other's meanings are unaffected.

For Gadamer, we can still take a critical stance, but this takes a dialogical form, there are no foundations existing outside of our linguistic world. We can have principles, but they are not existing "out there", but are embedded within particular horizons. Understanding must then be seen as a circular process – there are no more authoritative standards of reason to which we might appeal. Our assumptions do not become evident all at once, nor do we gain a full understanding of the object we study, but rather it is part of a complex dialogical process in which modifications and reinterpretations are made on all sides. Thus when we approach practices that differ from our own, this entails approaching it with an attitude of openness, not one which seeks to control (to be further discussed below).

Outhwaite helps clarify the way Gadamer's description of engagement can assist us in understanding the consequences of our rootedness in the social world. The fact that we are ourselves human beings makes it possible for us to understand something about what it is like to be another human being, but at the same time, 'this also means that we cannot simply record, in an objective and value-free way, the practices and beliefs of other human beings' (Outhwaite 1985: 29). The fact that we are embedded within our own cultural horizons makes objectivity impossible; we cannot leave aside our assumptions and prejudices in seeking to understand the Other. To modify an example given by Outhwaite, the feminist does not approach the unfamiliar cultural practice as a *tabula rasa* and return with an account of what it is like to be a woman within that culture; rather it is precisely the encounter between the feminist's own beliefs and practices and those of the culture she seeks to understand which make up whatever understanding she can have of another social reality (Outhwaite 1985: 29). The hermeneutical approach cautions then against naively and unthinkingly 'assimilating another's point of view, values, concerns—horizon—to one's own, and against placing one's own point of view beyond interpretation' (Code 2003: 5).

My argument is that employing the insights of Gadamer's hermeneutics in a generalized way for our understanding of "other" cultures can help us to avoid some of the pitfalls of "border crossing" discussed in the first section. The idea of horizons being "fused" can be transposed to any case where the occurrence of understanding involves overcoming an initial alienness (McDowell 2002: 191 n.14). It can open up a way of being critical, whilst attending to the situatedness of our position, thus opening up the possibilities for a cross-cultural dialogue.[27] In this way, it can mediate a way through the universalist/particularist divide.

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[27] There are many questions as to what form "dialogue" might take, for example, concerning who is to participate in this discourse. As Bauer and Bell ask in the context of discourse on human rights, '[s]hould the dialogue involve diplomats, international lawyers, leaders to religious traditions, academics, NGO representatives, ordinary citizens, or a combination of these? Inclusiveness can have a positive effect on such deliberations, but it may make it difficult to arrive at any conclusive resolution' (Bauer & Bell 1999: 11). The type of multicultural dialogue I am adhering to is not formal, but rather is an approach to understanding the "other" in general. The lack of consensus might here be seen as a strength rather than a weakness. The hermeneutical position has been criticised for its focus on consensus, by feminists amongst others (see Code 2003) – for the emphasis on a 'fusion of horizons' – as in reality, this would favour those who have the more powerful voice. Paul Kelly similarly questions whether the interests of marginal groups can be adequately represented through discursive procedures, pointing out that dialogue merely reflects the existing distribution of power. In ordinary politics, competition is between radically unequal players: 'In the real world of politics, groups and their interests compete or cooperate in accordance with their relative bargaining positions' (Kelly 2003: 107-

When applied to the task of cross-cultural communication, it both illuminates the act of (mis)understanding and provides an account of understanding which is sensitive to the corrosive possibilities of schematic methods. Where the scientific world view looks to explain and control, hermeneutics demonstrates that we should not enter into discourse with the aim of control, armed already with our categories of agency and so on, rather, we should approach with a certain "openness", allowing the possibility that our own position might well be challenged and changed through the encounter. In understanding, my goal should not be to attain full intellectual control over the object, for this would reduce negotiation to a sham. Rather, coming to an understanding requires listening as well as talking, which may require that I give some ground in my objectives (Taylor 2002: 281).

I now turn to discuss the approach of "world-travelling", which sees the strength of cross-cultural dialogical connection as coming out of its attention to particularity, and can be seen as complementing the fusion of horizons idea.

3. The world travelling approach

The world travelling approach is first developed by Maria Lugones in her article 'Playfulness, "World"-Travelling and Loving Perception', which focuses on the relationship between White/Anglo women and women of colour in American society (Lugones 1987). This is extended by Isabelle Gunning in her article 'Arrogant Perception, World-Travelling and Multicultural Feminism', to more widely address issues of cross-cultural understanding. Gunning outlines a methodology which sets out to understand 'culturally challenging' practices within their cultural context and 'relies upon a multicultural dialogue as a way to encourage the evolution of more shared values' (Gunning 1991-2: 193).[28]

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8). These concerns highlight the fact that universals are not sufficiently validated through dialogue, and that a dialogical approach must crucially take place against the backdrop of a thin universalism.

[28] I am following Gunning's use of the phrase 'culturally challenging'. She writes: 'I use the term "culturally challenging" to describe any practice that someone outside the culture would view as "negative" *largely* because she is culturally unfamiliar with it. I also want to suggest that such practices present a "challenge" to all who examine them: a call to engage in a process that produces growth and understanding' (Gunning 1991-2: 191, n8, italics added – I have emphasized 'largely' to try to avoid

The world travelling approach argues for a method of understanding that is centred on a complex combination of independence and connectedness. This requires that we seek to understand and respect the separateness of the "other" and accentuate their independence, while at the same time, avoiding too much distance or independence by recognising the similarities between us (Gunning 1991-2: 201-2). The simple fact of our connection negates the idea that we can describe other women only through reference to their own descriptions. Instead, our interconnectedness opens up possibilities for shared universalism:

> Our very desire as Western feminists to "do something" about the lives of other women exposes the fact that we do all live in an increasingly shrinking global village. We are different but not entirely dissimilar; we are independent beings but not without interconnectedness and overlaps (Gunning 1991-2: 202).

Gunning contends that it is crucial that when feminists seek to apply universals such as international human rights law, this be mediated through a multicultural dialogue and a search for areas of overlap, of shared concerns and values. Improvements in women's lives must be coordinated with respect for the diverse views among women on how this goal will be achieved (Gunning 1991-2: 191, 193, 247).

The idea of "worlds" and of "travelling" between them is interesting for my argument. For Lugones, a "world" is a loose idea which describes a construction of life which might be an actual society or a construction of a tiny portion of a particular society (Lugones 1987: 10). 'A "world" may be incomplete'. One can inhabit more than one of these "worlds" at the same time. A person may simultaneously exist in worlds in which she is constructed as an outsider and in other constructions of life where she is more or less 'at home'. To adapt Lugones's example, a Muslim living in Britain, might simultaneously live in a world that constructs her as stereotypically Muslim, and in a world that constructs her as Muslim (Lugones 1987: 3, 10-11).

Lugones contends that:

> most of us who are outside the mainstream of [the] dominant construction or organization of life are "world travellers" as a matter of necessity and of

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the relativist implication of the first part of this explanation – it might well be negative once she has full familiarity with the practice).

> survival. It seems to me that inhabiting more than one "world" at the same time and "travelling" between "worlds" is part and parcel of our experience and our situation (Lugones 1987: 11).

The 'outsider' has 'necessarily acquired flexibility' in shifting from one world to another. Here we can draw a comparison with Rushdie's migrants. While the activity of travelling between worlds is done 'unwillfully', and is necessary and 'compulsory' for the outsider, this should not obscure 'the enormous value of this aspect of our living'. Thus she recommends the wilful exercise of "world" travelling (Lugones 1989: 3). Importantly then, this state of "travelling" between "worlds", of being a migrant, need not always be an uncomfortable experience. Rather, it can be 'creative, rich, enriching' (Lugones 1997: 3). Thus the world travelling approach can be seen as taking the state of the outsider, who is a member of plural "worlds", or in Rushdie's terms, the state of the migrant, which applies at some level to us all, and using this to denote the stance of openness which is necessary to understand the other. 'Without knowing the other's "world," one does not know the other' (Lugones 1987: 18). Thus our capacity for hybridity is utilized as a means to understand each other. If we are to understand, we need as it were to travel, to gain the openness that can come from engagement with other "worlds". The notion of "travel" provides more than a metaphor since it has long been a human pastime to travel in order to "open our minds", or "broaden our horizons". Neither must this be literal – one is reminded of Rorty's argument for the spread of solidarity through turning to literature and sad and sentimental stories (Rorty 1989).

The task of understanding the context and condition of the "other" is to be performed with "playfulness".[29] This term is used not in the sense of "joyfulness" but rather to indicate an *open* rather than a *fixed* stance – one does not travel in order to judge ("this is a terrible place to be") but rather with an attitude of openness that rejects rules and structure. Playfulness demands a suspension of given rules or social codes, a willingness to explore new behaviour or attitudes without determining its "rightness" and "wrongness" (Gunning 1991-2: 204). It requires a certain '*openness to surprise*' (Lugones 1989: 16).

[29] Lugones constructs her concept of 'play' in express contrast with the concept as it is found in Gadamer, which she understands as to do with contest, with winning, losing, battling. Her sense of playfulness is instead seen as a loving attitude (Lugones 1987: 15).

This attitude of playfulness or 'loving perception' is contrasted with the idea of "arrogant perception", which Lugones adopts from Marilyn Frye.[30] Arrogant perception is seen as that which takes place

> when one person constructs another according to the first person's own interests, priorities, and conceptions. Rather than seeking to achieve understanding of the interests, priorities, and perspective of another as that other understands them, one engaging in arrogant perception allows her own interests and priorities to determine how the other is perceived (Wright 2004: 69).

The "arrogant perceiver" 'sees himself as the center of the universe' (Gunning 1991-2: 198). A key aspect of arrogant perception is the distance between "me" and "the other". In "arrogant perception", while the "I" is a subject, with my own perceptions, motivations, and interests, the "other" is unlike me. The "other" has no independent perceptions and interests, but only those I impose, and is understood as a lesser or defective form of the self (Gunning 1991-2: 199).

In analysis of cultural oppression which displays arrogant perception, there is evidence of '[d]istance but dependence' (Gunning 1991-2: 201). There is distance in the sense that "I" am talking about the oppressed "Other". Through not engaging with the difference of the other, she is presented as a lesser version of myself. The connection through "independence" sought by the world travelling approach suggests 'enough distance between oneself and the "other", that the "other" is recognized as engaged in and entitled to the same process of self-definition as oneself' (Gunning 1991-2: 198 n42). The task of world travelling is to see women as they understand themselves, through which we see women not as victims of their culture, but as active agents. When we travel 'to other people's "worlds" we discover that there are "worlds" in which those who are the victims of arrogant perception are really subjects, lively beings, resistors, constructors of visions' (Lugones 1989: 18).

The world travelling approach argues, then, that the recognition of both independence and interconnectedness is essential for cross cultural understanding (Gunning 1991-2:

[30] Lugones refers to Frye's essay 'In and Out of Harm's Way', in *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (1983).

204). This can be seen as an advantage over Gadamer who does not put forward a method, but for whom, engagement with the historical place of object and interpreter are unavoidable conditions of understanding. Gunning develops the world travelling approach into a methodology for evaluating culturally challenging practices, involving three steps. The first of these is that we must see ourselves in our own historical context. Secondly, we must attempt to see ourselves as the "other" might see us. And thirdly, we must see the "other" within her own complex cultural context, in other words, to see others through their own eyes (Gunning 1991-2). Gunning develops these through a discussion of "female genital surgeries".[31]

This practice takes many different forms, but is essentially the cutting or burning away of the female sexual organ, the clitoris, as well as the removal, in whole or part, of the other external female genitalia (Gunning 1991-2: 189). It has developed for a variety of social, health, economic and political reasons relating to the role and status of women in different cultures (Gunning 1991-2: 244).

i. Seeing oneself in historical context

The first point suggests that, in the context of labelling practices of "other" cultures as horrific abuses of human rights, part of understanding our own historical context would be to recognise a fact often omitted or even denied in discussions of the practice in Western countries that genital surgeries are also part of our own relatively recent cultural history. Reasons for treatment included hypersexuality, hysteria, nervousness, lesbianism and aversion to men. There are also recorded cases of women who demanded treatments themselves, viewing it as a fashionable fad or mark of favour (Gunning 1991-2: 208-9). There are two important points to emerge from Gunning's detailed discussion. Firstly, that 'the recognition that the practice of

[31] I am following Gunning's use of the term "surgeries". While 'circumcision' is misleading because it suggests surgery on a par with that undergone by males, female genital mutilation suggests a prior condemnation of the practice as abuse before the process of analysis has taken place. Walley points out that the terms themselves are embedded in the "either/or" perspectives characteristic of discussions of female genital operations – where *circumcision* implies relativistic tolerance and *mutilation* signalling moral outrage (Walley 1997: 408). The terms *female genital mutilation* and *female genital torture* 'carry the implicit assumption that parents and relatives deliberately intend to harm children' (Walley 1997: 407). The use of the term "surgeries" has benefit in that it avoids characterising the diverse versions of the practice as all under one type.

reconstructing female genitalia through surgery is a universal one and crosses cultural boundaries'. Secondly, by looking at other practices, such as breast enlargement, it highlights the fact that, although the specific American version of genital surgeries has largely been discontinued, the attitudes and assumptions on gender roles which provide the justification for female genital surgeries remain largely in place in our contemporary Western culture (Gunning 1991-2: 211). The aim in Gunning's discussion is not to suggest therefore that the practice of female genital surgeries is right, but that we must be careful as external observers in the attitudes with which we discuss culturally contentious practices, and the tendency to treat them as wholly "alien" or "other".

ii. Seeing oneself as the "Other" sees you

The second step of looking at ourselves as we are seen by the other, involves understanding one's historical relationship to the other. In the case of "third-world" cultures, external criticism is almost always viewed in terms of prior negative racial and colonial policies. Thus when "universal" values are asserted, they are very often perceived as only thinly disguised expressions of racial and cultural superiority and imperialism. A second point is that, just as the Westerner may view the surgeries as culturally challenging, the street runs both ways: non-Westerners might view certain Western practices as culturally challenging, including cosmetic surgeries, particularly breast augmentation, and self-starvation techniques. Looking at ourselves as others might see us deepens our view of ourselves and denotes care and caution rather than the air of superiority and self-righteousness that is often present in discussions of practices within different cultures (Gunning 1991-2: 212).

iii. Seeing the "Other" in her own context

The third step requires the recognition that 'any single event or norm is a part of a larger, complex, organic social environment' (Gunning 1991-2: 213). This requires a contextual and detailed look at the organic social environment which has 'produced' the practice. Gunning argues that surgeries are part of a complex system of male domination of women. For example, in Sudan, 'a girl or woman would have few prospects of getting married if she remained uncircumcised' (Gunning 1991-2: 215).

A more difficult part for the outsider is comprehending how women within the cultures can support the procedures. While clearly there are many coercive pressures at work that more or less force women to perform surgeries on their daughters, 'there are also positive ways of viewing the procedure that cause many women to embrace it and describe it as something that their families do "for them"' (Gunning 1991-2: 218).

From her detailed discussion which I have not had the space to go into here, Gunning concludes that, when one sees the "other" within her own cultural context, rather than as a victim of her culture, 'one sees women making a number of choices within the context of their complex social fabric'. This is not to say there is not a coercive aspect of patriarchal control in terms of physical violence as well as economic and social pressures.

> But one finds also the "lively beings," the "resisters", and "the constructors of their own visions." Different women struggle for their own vision of what is best and possible, both within and against the constraints of their culture (Gunning 1991-2: 226).

There are also many women within surgery-practicing cultures, 'often those who have a better education and who have been exposed to other social practices' (or perhaps, who have "travelled"), who oppose the practice. There are 'individual heroines who have stood up to their families and societies' and feminists who condemn the procedures and who have organized themselves into interest groups denouncing the practice (Gunning 1991-2: 223-4).

Ultimately the picture to emerge from Gunning's approach is actually fairly strongly "universalist". The problem of arrogance is not in the adverse reaction itself, since many within the culture share the same view of the practice. Rather, it is in the way this horror is expressed (Gunning 1991-2: 199). Embedded in the Western feminist attitudes to female genital surgeries is often, according to Gunning, 'the classic "us" (silent – good and enlightened) versus "them" (silent – ignorant and barbaric) distancing and "differencing" of arrogant perception' (Gunning 1991-2: 199). The world travelling approach helps evaluate, and criticise cultures, without rendering 'those African feminists already engaged in a struggle within their cultures over the

practice as either invisible or as stereotyped victims with a great need for yet another Western... saviour' (Gunning 1991-2: 198).

Thus an approach which recognises and attempts to understand the different "world" of the other should not be seen as a move towards relativism. For Gunning, the approach of world travelling in evaluating (and, indeed, condemning (Gunning 1991-2: 191)) the practice of female genital surgeries is not meant to replace the use of law, but rather law is to be mediated through it. The contextual approach works within normative limits. In the present context these might best be expressed through the existence of the human rights culture. What the contextual approach tries to do is to show how the universal does not exist at some point 'above' the local, but is rather attached to it and mediated through local norms, and emerges from out of dialogue. This involves the recognition that the language of human rights can be part of the problem. For instance, arguing for the abolishment of female genital surgeries through appeal to human rights norms that protect the rights of children can impede the desired discussions since African women are likely to feel that they are being called "incompetent and abusive mothers" (Gunning 1991-2: 233). Human rights arguments which cast the practice as torture or a form of slavery share the same difficulty (Gunning 1991-2: 235-6).

Another popular human rights objection to the surgery is that it violates the right to health. This is a more promising approach because, rather than adopting 'an accusatory tone, it resonates the concerns shared by African women on both sides of the surgeries debate, as well as by African men and governments' (Gunning 1991-2: 237). However this too faces many practical concerns, for instance it might suggest that doctors perform the surgery in sanitary conditions, rather than its outright abolishment. The resulting costs of this would again largely be borne by women, the "untrained" midwives who largely perform the surgeries. Not only do these women lose much of their economic and status base, but both are transferred to doctors who are usually male. Further problems 'may be created if women lose or dramatically reduce their control over female health care' (Gunning 1991-2: 230). [32] While the

[32] From the pragmatic point of view there are many reasons why a contextual approach is favoured over the simple application of universal standards. These include the question of how universal judgements are to be enforced. Eradicating a practice such as female genital surgeries through the use

question of critical judgement and efficacy of criticism and intervention are separate, Gunning's account shows how the one is not to be abstracted from the other, highlighting the close contextual engagement that is needed in the application of "universal" standards.

The approach of world-travelling suggests that universal values are found within all cultures and that these should be developed through dialogue, and encourages a degree of sensitivity that, from a pragmatic angle, would make the local population more responsive to human rights concerns (Coomaraswamy 1999: 87). Gunning writes that we are

> not stuck between choosing "universal standards" and "everything is relative." It is not that there are "universals" out there waiting to be discovered. But through dialogue, shared values can become universal and be safeguarded. The process by which these universal standards are created is important. A dialogue, with a tone that incorporates world-travelling concerns and respects cultural diversity, is essential. From that dialogue a consensus may be reached, understanding that as people and cultures interact they do change and learn from each other (Gunning 1991-2: 240).

To conclude this section, the "world travelling" approach rejects the framing of the debate as one of universal standards versus cultural relativism. Norms need to resonate with the local norms of particular cultures. Through the process of dialogue, shared values can become universal. The argument is that a contextual dialogical approach which takes on board the insights of hermeneutical understanding or world travelling is better placed than an abstract universalist position to promote conditions for cross-cultural discourse. It can avoid the often alienating and arrogant effects of an impartial view which underestimates its own historicity, and thus can avoid conceptualizing other cultures in ways that reproduce a stance of "us" and "them".

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of legislation can have mixed results. If people support the practice, then laws which ban it will have little effect: people will just hide the fact they are doing it which can exacerbate health risks (Gunning 1991-2: 229). Furthermore, there is also the issue of who is to be penalized and how. If parents are arrested for having their daughters "circumcised", this is likely to exacerbate the adverse affects on young girls, fining families who are already extremely poor does not offer a better solution. Furthermore, the initiators and practitioners tend to be mothers, grandmothers and midwives. Gunning asks: 'Would we want women, already struggling under disproportionate disadvantages in contrast to men, to face this additional burden? And it would seem quite ironic if the use of law for eradication purposes resulted in the systematic imprisonment or economic collapse of the most relatively powerful and economically independent women within the cultures' (Gunning 1991-2: 229-30).

4. Situated universalism

Feminist readers of Gadamer have tended to see his emphasis on tradition as conservative and damaging to the aims of feminism.[33] Similar concerns might be voiced with regards to Gunning's contextual approach. The final section addresses the worry that a contextual approach leaves us with no basis from which to be critical. It contends that an approach informed by two positions discussed can avoid this conservative outcome since, firstly, the emphasis is on world views or horizons not as fixed limits, but as *moving*, and secondly, that taking account of both our own situated position and that of the other, opens up the space for dialogue through which universals are more likely to be realised.

It is crucial for feminist politics that it not be left affirming the status quo. The commitment of feminism is to arrive not only at 'a refined and sensitive understanding of various points of view held by those immediately affected by an issue' but also 'to normative and political inquiry, which calls for questioning, assessing, analyzing, and criticizing various points of view' (Narayan 1997: 151). Accounts of tradition which are offered as authoritative must be interrogated since culture and identity are often invoked in ways which are often harmful to the interests of women. In the case we have looked at of female genital surgeries for example, Abdel Halim questions its presentation in certain societies as a central "authentic" Islamic tradition, arguing that it is rather an example of 'the same, tired theme of fundamentalist men interpreting Islam in a manner to enhance the patriarchal control of women's sexuality' (Abdel Halim 1997: 207). Even in rare situations where the interpretations offered do appear to correspond to a consensus within society, this may not eliminate the need for critique. It is crucial that we do not base ethical norms on the current preferences and the self-conceptions of people who are living in deprived and oppressed situations (Nussbaum 1999: 38).

Furthermore, as was seen in the discussion of female genital surgeries, external norms may be just the tools indigenous feminists require to dig their way out of oppressive patriarchal systems. As Martha Nussbaum writes:

[33] For examples of this, see Code (2003).

> One may...find that a voice that is in some sense foreign proves to be essential to the self-expression of a marginalized or oppressed group: for people often appropriate good ideas from outside and vindicate their dignity by pointing to examples of respect elsewhere (Nussbaum 1999: 8).

Nussbaum illustrates this through an example of a conference in Beijing at which most of the Chinese scholars were highly critical of the Confucian tradition as subordinating women. One scholar from Hong Kong however argued that the Confucian tradition could be mined for values of community and solidarity that could be used in building a Chinese feminism.

> The Chinese women reacted with unanimous negativity, saying that this was a "Western paper." She could not have said that, they said, had she not been from Hong Kong. For these women, the Confucian tradition was a living source of humiliation and disempowerment. It was not their voice... (Nussbaum 1999: 8-9).

The Chinese women located their tradition in their own critical thought and in the efforts of women to win respect within history, and also in J.S. Mill, who's *The Subjection of Women* was translated into Chinese early in the twentieth century and is a primary source of the Chinese feminist tradition. Thus Nussbaum challenges the assumption that one's tradition is assumed to be that of one's ethnic or religious group at birth:

> What is East and what is West? What is the tradition of a person who is fighting for freedom and empowerment?... Might it not, if one so chooses, be, or become, the international group of women—or of people who respect the equality and dignity of women? (Nussbaum 1999: 9).

This highlights the fact that, as Carens notes, constructive engagement is not necessarily more effective than confrontation as a means of bringing about a desired change in attitudes or policy (Carens 2000: 40). Thus a balance is to be struck between not assuming that ways of being which differ from our own view of agency are oppressed, on the one hand, and the need for cross-cultural standards of critique, on the other.

The argument of this chapter is that a contextual approach is able to meet these concerns by emphasising that these "worlds" are not static. It is clear that in the approaches discussed, the horizons or worlds are not in any way fixed. People are situated within particular horizons, but they are not invariably trapped. They can 'travel' between worlds, broaden or change their horizons. As Lugones writes, we are not passive in these worlds, 'we have not abandoned ourselves to, nor are we stuck in, any particular "world." We *are there creatively*' (Lugones 1989: 16-17). Thus, there need be no contradiction in recognising that people are situated within different "worlds" or world-views, and in insisting on our capacity to in some sense 'travel' between these, and for the worlds themselves to shift. The concept of horizons here helps us avoid collapsing into the kind of essentialised picture of cultures as sealed "wholes" I have been concerned to argue against. 'Horizons can be different, but at the same time they can travel, change, extend—as you climb a mountain, for instance' (Taylor 2002: 292). Cross-cultural translation is possible. Gadamer writes that each world view 'potentially contains every other one within it—i.e., each worldview can be extended into every other. It can understand and comprehend, from within itself, the "view" of the world presented in another language' (Gadamer 1989: 448).

We can use the experience of "travelling" between worlds or of "inbetweenness" to use Rushdie's term, the often uncomfortable state of being a migrant, as a positive way of being *creative*, of achieving the necessary openness of mind for cross-cultural understanding. We must recognise the creative function of difference in our lives. On the fusion of horizons position, understanding of the other necessarily also involves a changed understanding of ourselves. As Audre Lorde notes, '[d]ifference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic' (Lorde 1984: 111). The "West" is mistaken and arrogant to see itself as the one who does the changing rather than who needs to change. Thus we need a certain openness here, the kind of openness we might achieve through travel, metaphorical or otherwise. Gadamer writes that

> In human relations the important thing is...not to overlook his [i.e., the other's] claim but to let him really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs. But ultimately this openness does not exist only for the person who speaks; rather anyone who listens is fundamentally open.

> Without such openness to one another there is no genuine human bond (Gadamer 1989: 361).

Thus the fusion of horizons idea uses the metaphor of travel too. Both horizons reach out to meet each other. It is not just a matter of the interpreter taking the journey, what is being interpreted projects its horizon in front of itself. The ideal of this fusion of horizons for cross-cultural relations is that there is reached a new, shared platform from which dialogue can begin.

If we assume that understanding is to be achieved easily, we miss the situatedness of our own position. By allowing difference to collapse into a perceived sameness, we can miss our implicit assumptions which can have damaging consequences for cross-cultural communication. It is constantly necessary to interrogate our perceptions to avoid the 'overhasty assimilation of the [other] to our own expectations of meaning' (Gadamer 1989: 305). Charles Taylor sums up the outcomes of this dialogical process of learning about self and other:

> We learn to move in a broader horizon, within which what we have formerly taken for granted as the back-ground to valuation can be situated as one possibility alongside the different background of the formerly unfamiliar culture. The "fusion of horizons" operates through our developing new vocabularies of comparison, by means of which we can articulate these contrasts. So that if and when we ultimately find substantive support for our initial presumption, it is on the basis of an understanding of what constitutes worth that we couldn't possibly have had at the beginning. We have reached the judgment partly through transforming our standards (Taylor 1994: 67).

In the first section, I looked at how understanding the other in our own terms produces a simplified picture of cultures in which the other is effectively assimilated to our own conceptions of agency. What is needed is neither a prioritisation of tradition nor of universal rights, but a careful and particular investigation centred both on connection and independence. It should not be assumed that we know what types of dominations the other woman faces – there are different kinds of oppression. We must engage with the '*specificity of difference*' (Mohanty 2003: 224, italics added). Paradoxically, it is through affirming the otherness of the other that understanding can be reached. We do not leave our situatedness aside in order to make judgements concerning the situation of the other. The hermeneutical approach cautions us that claims to objectivity rest on

mistaken premises. A contextual approach which emphasises the need to look both at the context of our self and that of the other should not be seen as abandoning a universal account of human flourishing, but rather as responding to the difficulties involved in trying to specify these. This requires ways of thinking that are, in Clifford Geertz's words,

> responsive to particularities, to individualities, oddities, discontinuities, contrasts, and singularities, responsive to what Charles Taylor has called "deep diversity," a plurality of ways of belonging and being, and that yet can draw from them—from it—a sense of connectedness, a connectedness that is neither comprehensive nor uniform, primal nor changeless, but nonetheless real (Geertz 2000: 224).

A contextual approach that is animated by the insights of hermeneutics and world travelling enables a focus on the connections we share without assimilating the other to our own standards of agency. Therefore, instead of seeing other woman as victims of culture, we are able to see them as "subjects, lively beings, resistors, [and] constructors of [their own] visions' (Lugones 1987: 18). We must have more faith in the active agency of other women to challenge and reinterpret their cultures and communities. This requires, in Marnia Lazreg's words, that we take intersubjectivity into consideration when studying other women. This means:

> seeing their lives as meaningful, coherent, and understandable instead of being infused "by us" with doom and sorrow. It means that their lives like "ours" are structured by economic, political, and cultural factors. It means that these women, like "us," are engaged in the process of adjusting, often shaping, at times resisting and even transforming their environment. It means that they have their own individuality; they are "for themselves" instead of being "for us." An appropriation of their singular individuality to fit the generalizing categories of "our" analyses is an assault on their integrity and on their identity (Lazreg 1988: 98).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has aimed to highlight the fact that we are not faced with an either-or choice between universalism and relativism, but that, through the processes of mutual dialogue, it is possible to mediate a middle path or 'situated universalism'. My argument has been that a contextual approach which focuses on

multicultural dialogue is necessary in order to respond both to our independence and our interconnectedness. Attending to the horizon of self and other is crucial if we are to open up dialogue and reach understanding. The hermeneutical theory of interpretation offers important insights for approaching the evaluation of "culturally challenging practices", which enable us to be critical, whilst recognising the situated place from which we speak, and so cautioning us against projecting our own categories of understanding onto others in ways that erase particularities and obscure the other's agency. I have argued for a contextual culturally-sensitive approach which recognises the discursive dominance in simply imposing universal values and instead seeks to create and unearth shared values through dialogue. Understanding the "other" requires, amongst other things, that we gain greater awareness of ourselves and our own history. I have argued that this does not leave us with a conservative ethics since horizons move; both parties change through their engagement with each other.

While in this chapter I have been concerned to argue that a certain kind of distance and recognition of difference is necessary for cross-cultural understanding and dialogue, in the following chapter I turn to look at the objection that, rather than encourage a "fusion of horizons", the recognition of difference in fact encourages segregation and alienation.

CHAPTER 4

Identity, belonging and discourse: the case of British Muslims

Introduction

The previous chapter argued that a contextual and dialogical multicultural approach is necessary in order to develop and create the discursive space in which groups can foster cross-cultural understanding and reach a "fusion of horizons". In this chapter however, this link between multiculturalism and the space for discourse is examined more closely in the light of criticisms that accuse multicultural policies of achieving the exact opposite. The claim is that multiculturalism leads to the segregation and fragmentation of society and thus, far from reducing alienation of members of different cultural groups within society, in fact creates and exacerbates alienation. Here theoretical worries link directly to the current wide-ranging public debate on the efficacy of multicultural policies. This allows me to highlight the very real implications of the theoretical positions I have been discussing. The focus here is on this debate in the context of British Muslims. The recent bombing attacks on London, and the plot to set off explosive devices in the mid-Atlantic – and the fact that the suicide bombers were "made in Britain" – are evidence to many of the failure of the multicultural project, which is seen to create cultural "ghettoes" and foster extremism. The question posed in the media is often framed in such terms as: 'has multiculturalism helped cultivate inward-looking separatist fanatics who openly flout the West's basic moral values?' (Szego 2005).[34]

My argument will be that, while this does indeed present a damaging critique of a multiculturalism which seeks to preserve the identity of groups, a dialogical multiculturalism, the rationale of which is to increase the parity of groups within society, can avoid segregating communities. On the contrary, dialogical multiculturalism seeks to create conditions for increased integration – where

[34] This quote comes from Australian newspaper *The Age*, highlighting the global nature of such questions.

integration takes a multicultural form in which the majority can expect to be affected in the process of interaction as well as the minority.

The chapter is again divided into four sections. The first section lays out the criticism that multiculturalism leads to segregation, evidenced both in the media and in contemporary political theory. Section 2 outlines a defence of the multicultural project and the need for multicultural integration. I argue that rejecting multiculturalism in its entirety relies on a simplified notion of multiculturalism, and is mainly focused on "group rights". A form of constructivist multiculturalism that keeps a central view of the multiplicity of identity and the fluidity of cultural borders can avoid affirming policies which reify existing group structures. However, at the same time, these borders should not be seen as completely open-ended, but should be treated as both firm and open (Bhabha in Bhabha & Parekh 1989: 27). It is argued that an approach which recognises the existence of groups as well as individuals promotes the space for discourse both between and within groups. Between, because multiculturalism is aimed at promoting the equality of individuals within society, recognising that to some degree this requires considering them as members of groups. Within, because it is when groups feel under siege that they become more defensive and more likely to simplify the complexity of identity and tradition.

The third section seeks to illustrate the need for a differentiated response to diversity by exploring the notion of "hybrid" or "hyphenated" identities in the concrete experience of British Muslims. It focuses on the conditions in which a two-way integration can take place. What conditions enable people to feel comfortable with their hybrid identity, to feel a sense of belonging in society rather than feeling threatened and inclined to be inward-looking and insular? It is argued that a contextual dialogical stance is necessary precisely in order to foster conditions in which "newness" can be embraced (to use Rushdie's term), and in which individuals can feel comfortable with the different parts of their identity and so less disposed to reduce the multiplicity of the self into a neat package with a single identity label. The final section offers some brief comments on what a "fusion of horizons" and fostering of multicultural integration might mean in the context of British society.

1. Criticisms of multiculturalism

Ethnic minorities and immigrants in Britain are often perceived as being insufficiently committed to the politics and values of "the British way of life", the perception often being that they "come over here" and do little in the way of integrating themselves into British society. In the current political climate, this appears to be directed to a large extent at Asians, and particularly Muslims.[35] Far from leading to the opening up of the space for discourse and interaction, policies such as those which facilitate separate schooling and allow education and worship to be carried out in the minority language are seen as contributing to the creation of separate and isolated communities who lead "parallel lives" and have very little to do with each other. For example, in September 2005, *The Guardian* newspaper reported on a speech made by Trevor Phillips, the chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, in which he referred to the Cantle report of 2002 which looked into inner-city riots in three Northern English towns. Mr Phillips argued that '"We have allowed tolerance of diversity to harden into effective isolation of communities"', and said the report 'documented communities whose lives "often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap"'.[36] He concluded that multicultural policy in Britain has concentrated 'too much on celebrating diversity and not enough on emphasising our commonality.

The view is that multicultural policies exacerbate this segregation, encouraging the creation of cultural 'ghettoes' which foster alienation from the state and the majority community, and providing fertile grounds for the manipulation of this by radical clerics. For example, in August 2005, William Pfaff argued in *The Observer* that '[t]hese British bombers are a consequence of a misguided and catastrophic pursuit of multiculturalism' (Pfaff 2005). *The Financial Times* carried an article by Martin Wolf in which he argued that multiculturalism's departure from core British values 'is dangerous because it destroys political community... [and] demeaning because it

[35] Tariq Modood argues that most racial hostility in contemporary Britain is directed towards Asians and especially Asian Muslims; he gives evidence to suggest this is the case within the police force, the British National Party and the wider British public (Modood 2005: 12-3).

[36] The Cantle Report observes that: 'Whilst the physical segregation of housing estates and inner city areas came as no surprise, the team was particularly struck by the depth of polarisation of our towns and cities...Separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, means that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives. These lives often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchanges' (Cantle 2001: 9).

devalues citizenship. In this sense, at least, multiculturalism must be discarded as nonsense' (Wolf cited in Modood 2005b: 1).[37]

At the theoretical level, many of the worries about the segregating consequences of multiculturalism echo criticisms discussed in previous chapters. Central to these is the worry that, since "cultural groups" are not sealed and cohesive entities but are overlapping and internally heterogeneous, by granting power to the group as opposed to the individual, multicultural policies threaten to reinforce and reify artificial group borders. Specifically in the context of Muslims in Britain, the worry is that this might increase the power of religious leaders and fortify patriarchal family structures, thus reinforcing group borders with the effect of restricting internal dissent and change, and limiting cross-cultural interaction.

Perhaps the most sustained critique of multiculturalism or the 'politics of difference' comes from Brian Barry in his polemical *Culture and Equality*. Barry argues that multicultural policies such as differentiated treatment and group rights, and in particular the devolving of public functions to minority groups, lead to segregation and hostility between groups. He views the 'politics of difference' as resting on a rejection of the 'politics of solidarity' (Barry 2001: 300). Multiculturalism divides rather than unites people and so goes against the fight for social justice (Barry 2001: 89). Barry argues that a shared sense of belonging is a necessary condition if people are to support redistributions on social justice grounds and to create the trust which is necessary if groups are to be willing to compromise when interests inevitably conflict.

> It must be believed on all sides that a concession made today by one party will be matched with a concession by another party tomorrow, and that can come about only if members of minority and majority groups actually share in the running of their common institutions (Barry 2001: 89).[38]

He argues that the use of the term 'multiculturalism' to refer simultaneously to a state of affairs and a 'political programme' leads to illicit moves from the descriptive to the prescriptive (Barry 2001: 22).

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[37] Modood cites from Wolf 'When multiculturalism is a nonsense' *Financial Times*, 31st August 2005.
[38] Barry calls this 'civic nationality' – emphasising that it is not enough to feel that oneself belongs to society, citizens must also have firm expectations of each other and a sense of belonging together – to feel that others also belong and that those others feel that everybody else belongs (Barry 2001: 80).

Brenda Lyshaug argues that politicizing the significance of cultural attachment and using collective identities as the basis for granting group concessions can lead to fragmentation and insularity among certain groups and can generate resentment, tension and hostility among them. One way in which it does this is that groups can come to see themselves as competitors for society's limited public resources (Lyshaug 2004: 316-7). Lyshaug illustrates this through the example of post-Apartheid South Africa. In the case of so-called 'coloureds', individuals of mixed race origins, there is the alienating perception that affirmative action policies give black South Africans favoured status not only over whites, but also over those of mixed race (Lyshaug 2004: 317). Similarly, affirmative action within Britain can alienate and cause resentment among other groups in society. It can divide rather than unite the economically disadvantaged in a form of 'divide and rule' which works against the achievement of social justice. Furthermore, these feelings of resentment can be utilised by those with an interest in furthering segregation between groups, fundamentalists on the one side, the British National Party, for example, on the other.

2. Multiculturalism, power and integration: diversity and unity

The criticism that multiculturalism leads to the segregation of groups in society is crucially important and needs to be addressed. The question can be seen in part as one of balancing the demands of diversity with those of unity, which is a necessary condition for the survival of society. This section maintains that while strong multicultural models can indeed be dangerously segregating, a model of what might be termed liberal integration also fails to meet the demands of unity and diversity and multicultural dialogue, and must be expanded to take a "multicultural" form.

A "strong" multiculturalism which aims to protect cultural diversity does indeed appear vulnerable to the criticisms discussed. Starting with recognition of "group identities" threatens to reify culture in the ways discussed in chapter 1; it treats cultures as if they are 'sharply bounded, neatly separated and non-interacting' and 'as if it were obvious where one stops and another starts'. Consequently, a strong form of multiculturalism tends 'to promote separatism and group enclaving in lieu of transgroup interaction' (Fraser 2002: 24).

Multicultural recognition can grant power to the self-styled representatives of groups that might not be representative of many within the community, for example in the context of Muslim communities in Britain, some strands within the Muslim Council of Britain in the 1990s called for a strategy of separate institutions, focusing particularly on education, the desire for which was not shared by many within the community. Similarly, policies which reinforce the borders of groups serve to strengthen internal hierarchies in ways that reduce the room for internal dissent and can back up the power of radical clerics and reinforce their influence on young Muslims. In these and many other ways then, multiculturalism can be seen to strengthen the pulls of segregation within multicultural and multi-faith societies.

However, it is too quick a move to reject multiculturalism in its entirety. A constructivist multiculturalism, which understands identity as characterised by continuity and change, need not exacerbate alienation but on the contrary, is necessary to creating the conditions for cross-cultural interaction. On this model, recognition is not of a group's particular identity, but rather, following Fraser, recognition is of the ways in which individuals are unequal in society because of their membership of the group.

At this point it is worth clarifying the terms of the debate. While the terms assimilation and integration are often used interchangeably, I will understand them here as distinct. Where assimilation can be seen as a one-way process in which the desired outcome involves the least change in the dominant society, and in which the newcomers become as much like their new fellow citizens as possible, what I have called liberal integration can by contrast be viewed as a two-way process in which the majority community as well as the ethnic minorities and immigrants must take an active role (Modood 2005b: 3). Since it is the established society which is the site of institutions, including employers, civil society and the government, in which integration must take place, minorities cannot alone be blamed for "failing to or not trying to integrate", it is up to the established society to take the lead (Modood 2005b: 3). This usage is backed up in a speech made by Roy Jenkins in 1966 when he was British Home Secretary, whose words might be taken to represent equally well the view of most British citizens today:

> Integration is perhaps a rather loose word. I do not regard it as meaning the loss, by immigrants, of their own national characteristics and culture. I do not think that we need in this country a melting pot, which will turn everybody out in a common mould, as one of a series of carbon copies of someone's misplaced vision of the stereotyped Englishman....I define integration, therefore, not as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity, coupled with cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance (Jenkins 1967: 267).

These concepts of assimilation and integration align with Barry's distinction between 'absorptive assimilation', which requires complete acculturation, and 'additive assimilation' which Barry defines as, following Bauböck, 'retaining a previous cultural membership while acquiring a new one' (Barry 2001: 81).[39] Whilst calls in the media and public debates are often to the effect that immigrant groups should assimilate to British culture, this is not the claim being made by liberal critics of multiculturalism. Rather, they can be understood as supporting a form of integration, or in Barry's terms, additive assimilation.

Where multicultural accommodation of minorities differs from integration on the liberal model is that it recognises the social reality of groups (not just of individuals and organisations) – however far this reality might be 'an act of imagination'. Integration is not only seen as two-way, but will also be seen to work differently for different groups (Modood 2005b: 3).

In the discussion of Anglo-Indian literature in chapter 2, I explored Rushdie's portrayal of the multiplicity of the self and the fruitlessness of trying to encapsulate this into a unified whole. Since cultures overlap and there are multiple meanings within them, social actors are not confined within group borders. Horizons are not static but shift in the face of new encounters. This is nicely captured in Martin Hollis's use of Evans-Pritchard's image of the web:

> reflection, prompted by discordant experience or conceptual discrepancies, can reweave the web a little at a time. Revisions can even sum to what, with hindsight, may be deemed a paradigm shift. The web is not an external structure; but nor is it static (Hollis 1994: 245).

[39] Barry cites from Bauböck, *The Crossing and Blurring of Boundaries*, p43.

The worry with multiculturalism is that it sets artificial limits to the ways in which the web can be rewoven by tying individuals firmly to membership within a particular group. With regards to communication between groups, where the multiplicity of identities (of self and group) points to the translatability across, and fluidity of, "boundaries", and thus sees no inherent incommensurability between persons, multiculturalism is seen as drawing lines around identities, thus segregating societies and reducing communication.

As I have previously argued, we must be wary of the way a "strong" multicultural position could restrict internal change – for instance, by reinforcing the power of cultural leaders to assert their interpretations as "authentic". Hence the claims of recognition are to be rejected in so far as they attempt to allow people to artificially hang on to their identities in the face of change. Furthermore, to an extent we might say that multiculturalism as it is realised today does appear to have failed in bringing about a society in which members of all ethnicities, races and religions can feel an equal sense of belonging. Clearly there would appear to be a problem of alienation amongst minority groups in Britain.

However, rejecting multiculturalism *per se* rests on an over-generalized conception of the goals of multiculturalism and types of minority groups and the sort of relationship they desire with the larger society (Kymlicka 1995: 10). As was discussed in chapter 1, what is often being attacked is the tendency of multicultural accounts to fall into essentialism. However, while multiculturalism and essentialism often collapse into each other, to attack essentialism is to attack an easy target which does not capture the many subtle nuances of the multicultural insights (Squires 2002: 115).

Chapter 1 invoked Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblances in order to assert the possibility of using the notion of groups or cultures whilst avoiding reifying or essentialising them. Speaking of "culture" does not have to presuppose an essence: while there is no single defining characteristic that runs throughout, we have no trouble speaking of such a concept and understanding what is meant. That cultures share a family resemblance but no essential characteristics allows for their conception as at once rooted in change and continuity. While culture and tradition, or as Bhabha

phrases it, the 'symbols and images of continuity', are important in so far as they deeply shape people's outlook and people are deeply attached to them, they are not of value in themselves, to be preserved and protected, but are rather continually changing and 'subject to construction through fragmentation'. Thus the boundaries of culture and identity are to be seen as both firm and open; firm enough to hold themselves together, and yet open enough to absorb external influences and make their own impact (Bhabha in Bhabha & Parekh 1989: 27).

On this model of multiculturalism, the rationale is not about the preservation of diversity for its own sake (although at a separate level, diversity is viewed as welcome in itself, indeed a view shared, within limits, by liberalism),[40] but rather to create the context in which new identities can be forged but in terms which are not set by the strongly assimilationist thrust of modern liberal society. It seeks to encourage greater inclusion within society and to expand the space for dialogue. Thus the twin demands of unity and diversity are seen not as in tension with one another, but rather as intimately interlinked, working themselves out in an integrationist approach which takes a 'multicultural' rather than an assimilative form. The argument is that a multicultural approach is needed precisely in order to create conditions for integration: if individuals feel secure in their identity they will be less likely to define themselves by one aspect of it, which thus opens up the space for connection and discourse between groups. The logic of this rests on what Tariq Modood calls the 'ethnicity paradox' – that conversely,

> allowing more space to ethnic minority communities to do their own thing enables them to become a feature of the new society and creates a secure base from which participation in the institutions of the wider society follows' (Modood 2005: 110).

The argument is that the strength of the whole is dictated by the confidence with which it makes room for diversity.

[40] For example, Rorty notes how Mill and Dewey were dedicated to pluralism – to 'the maximization of opportunities for individual variation, and group variation insofar as the latter facilitates the ability of individuals to recreate themselves'. He writes that 'the only homogenization which the liberal tradition requires is an agreement among groups to cooperate with one another in support of institutions which are dedicated to providing room for as much pluralism as possible' (Rorty 1999: 196).

While there has been a vast literature on inequalities within societies in the context of racial and ethnic minorities, there has been comparatively little focus on communities whose lifestyle and customs are based on religious values (Mashuq ibn Ally 1990: 136). Failing to respond to these deep religious commitments means failing to appreciate the particular problems and challenges which these communities face. Modood points out that approaching issues concerning British Muslims through the category of "racism", understood in terms of the black-white relationship, is too narrowly defined. This casts racial discrimination as unfavourable treatment on the grounds of colour. Stereotypical images of black people are cast mainly in terms of physical characteristics – for example of strength, rhythm and lacking in intelligence. By contrast, the racialized image of Asians appeals not so much to physical characteristics but to cultural motifs such as language, religion, family structures, exotic dress and cuisine (Modood 2005: 6-7). Thus Modood observes that British Muslims suffer a form of double racism: cultural racism as well as colour racism. His point is not that Asians suffer more racism, such as harassment, discrimination and institutional exclusion, than blacks in Britain, but rather that relying on the black-white framework obscures the extent of racism against Asians (Modood 2005: 7). Thus anti-racism, understood in terms of colour, must be accompanied by an interrogation of cultural racism if the ways in which individuals are devalued because of membership in a cultural group – or specifically the phenomenon of 'Islamophobia' – are to be understood.

Barry's argument is that it is important that everyone have a stake in a common entity. Too much emphasis on how we differ rather than on what we share is damaging. He argues that all groups should share in the running of common institutions (Barry 2001: 89) and insists that 'the interests of everyone must count equally, and that there are no groups whose members' views are to be automatically discounted' (Barry 2001: 80). However it is precisely here that liberalism would do well to heed multicultural insights. As noted by Horton, Barry:

> neglects the possibility that some groups may be able to get their norms accepted as *the* local norms across almost all areas in which they can be legitimately enforced, thereby comprehensively and systematically disadvantaging other groups (Horton 2003: 38).

The problem with procedural liberalism is that society is not neural but is structured through the values of the mainstream community. As Young argues, since

> some groups have exclusive or primary access to [in Nancy Fraser's phrase] the means of interpretation and communication in a society... the dominant cultural products of the society... express the experience, values, goals, and achievements of these groups (Young 1990: 69).

The discursive power of the majority is its ability to enforce its meanings as the correct ones. Thus, as Modood observes:

> [i]n so far as subordinate, oppressed or marginal groups claim equality, what they are claiming is that they should not be marginal, subordinate or excluded; that they too – their values, norms, and voice – should be part of the structuring of the public space. Why, they ask, should we have our identities privatised, while the dominant group has its identity universalised in the public space? The issue, then, is about the public/private distinction and what is "normal" in a society, and to lessen any group feeling abnormal or different (Modood 2005b: 4).

When the character of public institutions reflects only the dominant culture it will be hard for members of other cultural groups to feel at home in the polity (Mason 1999: 285). If people do not have equal opportunity to take part in the democratic process and to have their voice heard, and do not see themselves reflected within its institutions, they will become less likely to identify with a "common democratic culture" and more likely to feel powerless and alienated. Where minority groups hold legitimate grievances, these can be reinforced by the fact that the group's means of addressing it is itself suffused in the dominant culture. Important here is the extent to which the media is the product of the dominant ideology within society. The sense of powerlessness this can create can lead to a rejection of the shared political community as a means for resolution of differences, to be replaced in some cases by an exploration of more subversive avenues of dissent.

If our starting point is the multiplicity of identity, where the self is seen as 'an unending act of self-enactment' (Parekh in Bhabha & Parekh 1989: 24), then the focus should be on what conditions allow the individual to embrace outward influences in a fusion of horizons rather than encourage them to become insular and inward looking. In what conditions can people feel a sense of belonging and

inclusion, not be forced to choose between "worlds" (in Lugones's sense) but free to travel between them? As Modood phrases it, the issue is

> how to achieve a society in Britain that is not racially stratified and in which recent non-white migrants and their progeny can come to have a genuine sense of belonging to Britain without having to disavow their ethnic identities (Modood 2005: 6).

The argument is that a form of multiculturalism is necessary in order to create the space in which different communities are able to interact on equal terms and to reach a greater level of understanding of each other. The ideal of this kind of multiculturalism is of a society characterised by cultural interaction, borrowing and the widening of horizons, in which cultures constantly encounter one another both formally and informally, in private and public spaces, and in which, guided by 'curiosity, incomprehension or admiration', they challenge each other's assumptions, and consciously or unconsciously borrow from each other (Parekh 2000: 220). For Parekh:

> Multiculturalism doesn't simply mean numerical plurality of different cultures, but rather a community which is creating, guaranteeing, encouraging spaces within which different communities are able to grow at their own pace. At the same time it means creating a public space in which these communities are able to interact, enrich the existing culture and create a new consensual culture in which they recognise reflections of their own identity (Parekh in Bhabha & Parekh 1989: 27).

In this, it is crucial that the national identity of a political community should not be drawn in terms that exclude minority groups. Since individuals have deep commitments, 'national identity should allow for such multiple identities without subjecting those involved to charges of divided loyalties' (Parekh 2000: 232). Parekh suggests that when a group feels under siege, it becomes more controlling and less willing to critically evaluate its central beliefs, thus that there is less room for dissenters (Parekh in Bhabha & Parekh 1989: 25).

I argue that a contextual, multicultural approach which is able to take on the insights of world travelling and Gadamer's hermeneutical position will be better able to respond to these complexities than a difference blind liberalism. I now turn to illustrate the need for contextual engagement through a discussion of the experiences

of British Muslims, before moving in the final section to consider what a fusion of horizons might in practice entail.

3. Hybrid identities: the experience of British Muslims

The claim that multiculturalism leads to segregation is of crucial importance in a political climate in which crude concepts of identity are mobilized to generate fear and misunderstanding between different groups. In the context of British Muslims, Islam as a faith and Muslims as a whole have found themselves the victims of 'Islamophobia', defined by the Runneymede Trust as 'dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, fear or dislike of all or most Muslims' (The Runneymede Trust 1997: 1). This negative perception of Muslims is illustrated publicly by politicians such as Robert Kilroy-Silk, who has denounced the entire community of Muslims across the world as failing in every way, and writers such as Will Cummins, who has attacked 'the black heart of Islam' and stated that '[a]ll Muslims, like all dogs, share certain characteristics' (cited in Afshar 2005: 263). This tone is given theoretical weight by theorists such as Samuel Huntington who claim that the difference between the "West" and the "rest" is so fundamental that there can only be a "clash of civilizations" (Huntington 1996). The perception of Muslims is often that they present 'a threat' to the West, which has resulted in an assimilationist thrust which questions the desirability of multicultural policies on language, dress and education, and which is seen to justify placing restrictions on civil liberties. Fekete suggests that, in a 'climate of fear, hostility and suspicion, homogeneity is fast becoming western Europe's security blanket' (Fekete 2004: 22).

The lack of complexity with which these questions are handled in the press increases lack of understanding and creates a wide gap between the Muslims' perception of who they are and the ways in which they are viewed by the host country (Afshar 2005: 262). In Mary Lugones's terms, Muslims in Britain simultaneously exist in "worlds" in which they are differently constructed, and in which they are constructed as the 'Other' by mainstream society. This conception of "difference as otherness" is suggested in the test of Britishness famously forwarded by the formerly Conservative minister Norman Tebbit, in which one's claim to be British is decided through which side one cheers for in test cricket (Ansari 2002: 13).

Portrayals of Islam as undifferentiated and immune to the process of change obscure the complexities of Muslims' experiences. Both Western 'orientalists' on the one hand and Islamists on the other have tended to emphasize the differences between Islam and the West, thus essentialising and homogenizing Muslims (Ansari 2002: 4).[41] To speak of Muslims in Britain in terms of their presenting a homogeneous group clearly makes little sense since they are distinguished by major ethnic and geographical divisions, as well as important regional, linguistic, political, caste and other differences (Mashuq ibn Ally 1990: 139). Within communities there are many challenges to "traditional" social arrangements and values. For example, many Muslim women actively challenge the patriarchal structures that limit women's entry into mosques and otherwise exclude them.

The polarizing of communities is deliberately sustained and encouraged by Muslim voices seeking to reinforce the perception of Muslims versus the West, encouraging its members to define themselves solely by their faith. For example, the *Hizb ut-Tahrir* announced that it is no longer possible for the youth in the UK to be both British and Muslim and declared that it is necessary to choose between faith and nationality (Afshar 2005: 262). Polarization is also exacerbated by those coming from the opposite direction, for instance those who call for a wholly secular state and the privatisation of religion.

In debates which challenge the efficacy of multiculturalism it is crucial that shorthand portrayals of identity are replaced by contextual and dialogical engagement with the differentiated experiences of Muslims forging their identities in Britain. In chapter 2, the picture of the hybrid self as drawn by Salman Rushdie was one of agonizing and struggling with the complex identity which is constructed from many different sources. As Rushdie writes of *The Satanic Verses*:

> What is being expressed is a discomfort with a plural identity. ... We are increasingly becoming a world of migrants, made up of bits and fragments from here, there. We are here. And we have never really left anywhere we have been (Rushdie cited in Mashuq ibn Ally 1990: 134).[42]

[41]This simplified view is present in the "Asian values" debate over human rights which construes human rights as a creation of the West. This will be discussed in chapter 7.
[42] Mashuq ibn Ally cites from G. Marzorati, 'Salman Rushdie: Fiction's embattled infidel', in *Parade*, June 1989.

If the self is understood as developing in relation to her culture and society, the migrant faces particular problems, since much of what has provided that initial context is lost. Parekh describes how many immigrants cope with this through clinging to shared 'memories' and narratives:

> They live together and rely on collective historical memories and images to counter their increasing self-alienation. Unlike personal memories, historical memories are objective, institutionalized in traditions, beliefs and practices. They become a source of meaning, a way of guarding against insanity and of providing some social and cultural depth. They also relate you to others, both in Britain and the countries of your origin, keeping alive the idea of an eventual 'return' (Parekh in Bhabha & Parekh 1989: 24).

Identities are seen in terms of both change and continuity. The continuity is sustained by shared memories, stories and cultural practices; the change results from reaction to new circumstances and a complex process of negotiations that result in a multiplicity of identities that 'may or may not contradict each other' (Afshar 2005: 273).

Muslim communities are still relatively new within Britain. For many Muslims, coming to Britain means migrating from an undeveloped area to one that is economically developed, often moving from rural villages to urban centres (Mashuq ibn Ally 1990: 145). Afshar et al describe the experiences of migrant women, who have moved across geographical and national boundaries:

> to a land where, on arrival, they became 'different' and an 'ethnic minority'. Nothing in their earlier lives had prepared them for the experience of racism that many encountered as a result. The move had made much of the knowledge they had acquired up to then meaningless. Their language, their faith, their traditions and rituals all cease to be the 'norm'. Many have moved from warm open spaces into small cold surroundings where they have almost no skill and know how in dealing with the most basic requirements of everyday life (Afshar 2005: 267).

People caught in the midst of these changes often feel threatened and fearful, and therefore seek to preserve rather than to confidently welcome change (Mashuq ibn Ally: 1990: 145). Individuals are likely to turn to the social support offered to them by others of the same faith, language and culture. For many the one permanent point of identity has been their faith, which provides a source of stability and comfort. Afshar et al cite one of the women they spoke to as saying: 'But when you face Mecca and say the *nemaz, then* you feel safe and protected' (Afshar 2005: 267).

The aspect of change within these "hyphenated" or "hybrid" identities does not happen solely at the point of migration. Migration and settlement should be seen as an ongoing process rather than a set of isolated actions (Mashuq ibn Ally 1990: 140). A major contributory factor in constructing the identity of British Muslims is their perception by the mainstream community. For example, despite characterisations of "immigrant communities", most younger Muslims living in Britain are not migrants; the construal of them as such by the wider community effectively denotes another form of exclusion. Parekh notes that the term 'second or third-generation immigrant' is deeply misleading since it is used to describe individuals who are not immigrants, but are the children or even grandchildren of immigrants, and who have as much right to an input into the culture of Britain as anyone else (Parekh 2000: 233). This state of being not wholly accepted in Britain is illustrated by the comments of a woman of Sudanese and British parents: 'I can never say that I am British, because if I do they always say: 'but where are you from originally?'' (Afshar 2005: 274).

An important aspect of Muslim self-understandings is their belonging to the *Umma*, the international Islamic community, which provides a transnational source of identity. This draws its membership from a variety of ethnic, national and racial groupings, while at the same time it transcends these boundaries by providing its members with a shared set of beliefs, values and norms (Mashuq ibn Ally 1990: 137-8). Mashuq ibn Ally explains that Muslims believe that Allah is sovereign and hence that sovereignty does not reside in human beings or territory. Human beings are seen as the trustees of God and are responsible for upholding the ethical imperatives of the faith which are the maintenance of human life, freedom, peace, justice and equilibrium. Within this perspective, 'Islam is the most important characteristic of a Muslim's humanity: it fires a vision of reality and inspires the articulation of that vision'. Religion 'is the very essence and core of culture, the lens through which all thinking and understanding takes place' (Mashuq ibn Ally 1990: 138).

The loyalty of Muslims to the global Muslim community need not be in contradiction with their also belonging to Britain. Rather, Afshar et al contend that Islam and the *Umma* as a political space facilitates the development of hyphenated identities and provides a means of overcoming the confines of minority Muslim groups (Afshar 2005: 278). The *Umma* is described as:

> a righteous, strong and united Islam, which does not prevent [Muslims] from retaining their identities as British, Pakistanis or Gujaratis, but encompasses all those identities within a permeable unbounded communality of dreams and aspirations (Afshar 2005: 277).

Thus membership of Muslims in the global Islamic community should not be seen as "a threat to Britishness", overriding loyalty to the Muslim's local culture and nation, but rather as providing the means through which Muslims can participate fully in their particular surroundings, without compromising their faith.

Muhammad Mashuq ibn Ally writes that the relationship of the *Umma* to the world is the enduring challenge of Islam, and that central to this is the problem of nationality and culture:

> Islam was never to be identified with any culture or any nation; this was the freedom given by God. Yet Muslims have an almost irresistible tendency to identify their faith with their own sub-culture and their nation. In doing so, they threaten to confine its expression within the narrow limits of a single national sub-cultural milieu, and ultimately destroy the universality which enables life and God to be meaningful to humans of all times and all nationalities (Mashuq ibn Ally 1990: 140-1).

He therefore identifies a central feature of the challenge for the Islamic *Umma* in Britain, and to every sub-group within it, as being to distinguish between 'that which is essential to the Faith, and that which is its transitory cultural, historical, or national expression', in relation not only to faith, but to ideas and interests, political objectives and education (Mashuq ibn Ally 1990: 140). This is underpinned by a distinction between two human states: the state of quiescence which is the state of passive maintenance of an achieved uniformity, and that of creative advance into the unknown, which includes a turning away from the customs and traditions of ancestors into new, uncharted ways of life. To cope with the challenges this presents, Muslims have not only to provide a theological response to their situation, 'but also an intellectual dialectic between their enriching heritage and the heritage of British culture' (Mashuq ibn Ally 1990: 140). This forwards a view of Islamic culture not as static and unchanging and in tension with the goals of liberal democracy, but as dynamic and containing within it the resources for a creative relationship between both.

New versions of hybrid identities are forged by those who question the traditional structures of their communities. Young Muslims 'negotiate new ways of being Muslim in Britain' (Ansari 2002: 13). For example, emerging Muslim youth culture in Bradford is expressed in hybrid fusions of South Asian and British music. Faisal Islam suggests that "rude boy" culture is an example of how integration is taking place, but through a mode in which new forms of being British are formed. Importantly, these constructions are not taking place within segregated communities but rather find expression in Muslim and non-Muslim communities alike. He observes:

> Go to Havana club in Manchester and you will see young people of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black origin, from across the north, all enjoying garage music together... Manchester's Central Library is a hormonal hotbed of Asian teenagers flirting in reference sections... Drop into a job centre... and you see small groups of similarly-dressed Asian and white people surfing electronic notice-boards for jobs (Islam cited in Ansari 2002: 13).

It is clear then that there is no inherent tension between the central values of Islam and those of British society. While radical Islam claims to be authentic Islam, there are many ways of interpreting it which are not in contradiction with wider conceptions of universal values.

However, many young Muslims feel unrepresented by those who speak in the name of their communities, and lack a sense of belonging in modern British society. Within Pakistani communities there is a high level of unemployment and often low levels of education. In these conditions, Muslim individuals can provide perfect targets for religious extremists who offer an alternative support network, and crucially, a sense of belonging. The manipulation of identities is often for reasons of power and economics. Parekh notes that both the

> mullahs, as well as the so-called progressive Muslim leaders who act as brokers between the state and their community, have a good deal to gain by encouraging their followers to define themselves primarily in religious terms. This is one way they can retain their power base and attract money from British and international sources (Parekh in Bhabha & Parekh 1989: 24).

As more people move away from 'traditional' Islam, this gives those with a vested interest even more reason to raise the cry of Islamic values being in danger. Parekh contends that it is important to note how inclusive Islamic values, such as that of creative advance into the unknown, are changed on being brought into a new environment, tending to become more insular. As Parekh writes, '[w]hat was a richly-nuanced body of beliefs and practices gets abbreviated into a set of abstract formulae, and a tradition degenerates into an ideology' (Parekh in Bhabha & Parekh 1989: 25). Parekh suggests that it is in this context that the logic of fundamentalism should be understood. While all civilisations at times return to their past, recapture their central principles and reinterpret them in the light of the present, when

> a group feels besieged and afraid of losing its past in exchange for a nebulous future, it lacks the courage to critically interpret its fundamental principles, lest it opens the door to 'excessive' reinterpretation. It then turns its fundamentals into fundamentalism, it declares them inviolate and reduces them to a neat and easily-enforceable package of beliefs and rituals (Parekh in Bhabha & Parekh 1989: 25).

So from this direction, the conditions both for questioning within communities and for dialogue between communities can become closed off. Modood notes that 'Islamist' groups are antithetical to multicultural integration since they divide people into two – Muslims and non-Muslims – and 'tend towards absolutism (namely, one identity always trumping all others)' (Modood 2005b: 6). Since identities are constructed through interaction and in opposition with the other, the fundamentalist polarizing of Islam and British community works hand in hand with anti-Islamic rhetoric from within the mainstream. Islamophobia, the portrayal within some media outlets of all Muslims as fundamentalists, and exclusive descriptions of the "British way of life", make it harder for individuals to hold hyphenated identities. Reacting to acts of terrorism by calling for a retreat from multiculturalism would in itself seem to implicitly tie the actions of a few individuals to "Islam" as a whole, effectively equating Muslims with terrorism. Yet most Muslims see Islamist groups as dangerous to the Muslim community in much the same way as the mainstream community view the British National Party. The language and tone in which public debates are carried out is crucial to the chances for successful communication between communities. When, for example, clashes of values between Muslim and mainstream society in

Britain are framed in terms of a clash between liberal values and "fundamentalism", this has alienating effects. Since Islam can be seen as the most important characteristic of a Muslim's identity, where British Muslims feel that they must choose between the Muslim and the British parts of their identity it will become more difficult for them to integrate into British society.

To be noted here is how immigrants are forced to define themselves in ways that the majority are not. Thus the construction of identity is tied to the possession of, or lack of, power. This recalls the literalised demonization of aliens and migrants by the 'host' country seen in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*: 'They describe us,' Chamcha is told. 'That's all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct' (*Satanic Verses* 168). The majority do not face the same need to self-consciously assert their identity. As Ralph Crane notes,

> [t]hose who have power (the British in India, whites in Britain, men in patriarchal societies) rarely need to concern themselves with the construction of identity. Conversely, those without power need to use their otherness to construct a homogeneous identity as a means of empowerment (Crane 2000: 8).

Thus those in the dominant group often have a disparaging attitude towards claims for recognition, treating ideas of belonging to collectivities as inferior to individualism. But this in itself conceals the expression of a particular collective identity. Parekh argues that the language of individualism conceals an insidious form of racism: the Englishman can talk about being an individual 'because he is already grounded in his own ethnic way of life'. This really amounts to individualism for the immigrants, and some form of ethnic collectivism for the British society (Parekh in Bhabha & Parekh 1989: 27).

The discussion in this section suggests that the deep attachments that Muslims have to the Islamic part of their identity are misunderstood if viewed as 'voluntary'. Recalling Young's relational construction of identity, this affinity is likely to be strengthened and made more exclusive by negative portrayals of them within mainstream society. Muslim identity is neither static nor in necessary tension with acceptance of Britishness as an important part of British-Muslim identity. It is argued that in order for this redefinition to move in plural and inclusive directions, in which the part of

being British plays an important role, integration is crucial. However, it is crucial that this integration is not assimilative, but that it responds to deep (but changing) religious attachments and creates conditions in which new forms of being a British Muslim can be forged through expansive and inclusive, rather than narrow and absolutist, terms.

4. Multiculturalism and the fusion of horizons

The argument of this chapter is then that a multicultural response which considers groups as well as individuals is needed in order to create the conditions in which people can feel a sense of belonging, and to respond to the inequalities that exist between groups in society. Rather than segregate groups, a multiculturalism of the kind forwarded here is aimed at fostering the conditions for cross-cultural interaction and a "fusion of horizons", and thus in theory fosters rather than diminishes the unity of the whole. In this final section, I turn to consider what creating the conditions for a fusing of horizons might entail in the context of Muslims living in Britain. I will consider this in three parts. Firstly, I argue that this requires an attitude of multicultural openness – which sees integration as two-way (or multi-way) in which all groups can expect to be changed by the encounter. Secondly, the contention is that in practice this requires not simply more representation of minority groups, but interrogation of the existing boundaries of the public sphere. The third part concludes with some general points on encouraging a shared multicultural culture.

i. Multicultural understanding as an attitude of openness

At the theoretical level, approaching multicultural situations with a picture of individuals as free rational choosers does not allow us to engage at any deep level with the issues at hand. Though crucial to insist on the capacities of individuals for reflection and questioning of existing horizons, this does not negate the need to respond to individuals as encumbered and historically and socially situated. This requires a complex approach of independence and interconnection of the kind promoted by the world travelling method. A certain kind of hermeneutical distance is needed in order to avoid imposing one's norms and assumptions as universal. My attempts to understand must recognise my own assumptions in a backward and

forward motion which attempts to reach a "fusion of horizons". This should be seen as a two-way process in which in coming to see the other correctly, our understanding of ourselves is inevitably shifted as well (Taylor 2002: 295).

Thus a fusion of horizons is driven by the hermeneutic imperative to try to understand cultures, events and so on as they appear "from the inside", and to realise the embedded context in which our thinking takes place. Part of the problem in multicultural encounters is the tendency to identify one's own culture and values as natural, resulting in the tendency to judge others according to our own standards (Mashuq ibn Ally 1990: 142-3). Thus for example, non-Muslims tend to interpret the veil as a symbol of Muslim women as compliant and unreflective and subject to patriarchal traditions, seeing this as representative of Islam's demeaning attitude towards women and creating the impression that the subordination of women is a specifically Muslim characteristic. Yet this is not the lived experience of many Muslims who wear the veil (Ansari 2002: 14). Similarly from the other side, when a Muslim sees half-naked female models displayed in the pages of daily newspapers, this is likely to be viewed as representative of British disrespect of women's honour (Mashuq ibn Ally 1990: 143).

An attitude of openness is often foreclosed by the tendency amongst liberals to treat religious identity as chosen. For liberal theorists such as Barry and Waldron, the fact that identities are not fixed and determined means that religious beliefs can be treated in the same way as personal taste – that the former are just as much changeable by an act of will as are the latter (Horton 2003: 29). While characteristics of race and sex are seen as ascribed and unchosen, and therefore as the subject of justice, since inequalities due to factors which are unchosen are seen as unfair, the fact of being a Muslim is seen however as being about chosen beliefs (Modood 2005b: 4).

Modood observes that this type of view leads to the perception that Muslims need or ought to have less legal protection than other kinds of identities such as those based on race, sex or sexuality. The position of Muslims is instead seen as parallel with other kinds of chosen "difference". Modood writes that no one

> chooses to be or not to be born into a Muslim family. Similarly, no one chooses to be born into a society where to be or to "look like" a Muslim creates suspicion, hostility, or failure to get the job you applied for (Modood 2005b: 4).

The outdated focus of the "liberal/communitarian" debate on the question of whether the self is *necessarily* culturally determined or capable of re-invention has unhelpfully focused the literature away from embedded agents who can feel real pain where their deepest commitments are concerned, and it is not difficult to see that engaging in multicultural disputes regarding the Muslim's identity as revisable and impermanent, works against the stance of openness that is needed for cross-cultural understanding. If people feel like their identity is under siege, they will be more likely to define themselves in exclusive terms, thus narrowing the space for Rushdie's "newness".

ii. Expanding the public sphere

Feminist and multicultural theory (amongst others) have both been concerned to show that simply ensuring a "neutral" public sphere works in the favour of the majority and the already powerful, and to the detriment of those in minority groups and less powerful sections of society. Cultural neutrality privileges the dominant culture and fails to ensure the equality of power and resources that are required for a genuine intercultural interaction (Parekh 2000: 222). Formally giving everyone an equal voice favours the majority, and the most powerful within society, this being often men (to be discussed in chapter 6).

It is important to recognise how social inequalities can act as informal impediments to participatory parity and can infect deliberation, even in the absence of any formal exclusions. Inequalities can be obscured by the public/private divide, which sees cultural and religious differences as properly the subject of the private sphere. Fraser argues that, contra Habermas's discourse ethics, inequalities cannot simply be "bracketed" (Fraser 1997: 78). Likewise, Simone Chambers notes that communicating "as if" we are all equal, when in fact we are not, is not enough to immunize discourse from the distorting effects of economic inequality (Chambers 1996: 206). Deliberation can easily serve as a mask of domination:

> the transformation of "I" into "we" brought about through political deliberation can easily mask subtle forms of control. Even the language

> people use as they reason together usually favors one way of seeing things and discourages others. Subordinate groups sometimes cannot find the right voice or words to express their thoughts, and when they do, they discover they are not heard. [They] are silenced, encouraged to keep their wants inchoate, and heard to say "yes" when what they have said is "no." (Mansbridge cited in Fraser 1997: 78).

The public sphere is not 'a space of zero-degree culture', able to 'accommodate with perfect neutrality and equal ease interventions expressive of any and every cultural ethos'. One reason for this is that unequally empowered groups will tend to develop unequally valued cultural styles, which will result in 'the development of powerful informal pressures that marginalize the contributions of members of subordinated groups both in everyday life contexts and in official public spheres' (Fraser 1997: 79). Fraser notes how these pressures are amplified by the fact that the media, which constitutes material support for the circulation of views, is privately owned and operated for profit, and therefore less powerful social groups will usually lack equal access to the material means of equal participation. In this way political economy 'enforces structurally what culture accomplishes informally' (Fraser 1997: 79).

The point of this discussion then is to show that creating and developing conditions in which members from different groups can reach something like a "fusion of horizons", requires attending to how the arena(s) in which discourse takes place is structured and the hidden inequalities within the sphere of discourse. Crucially, questions of redistribution must not be divorced from those of recognition.[43]

This suggests that participatory parity within the public sphere requires more than increased representation of minority groups within the existing boundaries of the public sphere, rather, as this is inherently created in a way that favours a particular group, e.g., the dominant male, the boundaries themselves need to be open to interrogation. As Modood notes, inclusion into a political community should not be defined as 'accepting the rules of the existing polity and its hallowed public-private boundary lines'. A more expansive understanding of the political can be:

[43] See Nancy Fraser's important argument against the false juxtaposition between redistribution and recognition (Fraser 1997, 2002).

> compatible with the idea of shifting boundaries and politics as debate and allows for the changing of certain attitudes, stereotypes, stigmatizations, media images, and national symbols as primary political goals (Modood 2005: 155).

Theorists such as Fraser and Benhabib have forwarded a pluralistic model of the public sphere which consists of multiple and overlapping networks of publicity, within which 'different logics of reason giving, greeting, storytelling, and embedded speech can flourish' (Benhabib 2002: 138-9).

This questions the strict separation of the public and private spheres. For example, Joseph Carens argues that one of the strongest liberal democratic requirements (in order to gain the status of 'citizen') is the capacity to abstract from one's own identity, as far as political and public matters are concerned. Carens suggests that this problem is not connected to Muslims' identity, but to the concept of democracy itself. He argues for a model of democracy that

> simply requires that people listen and engage with each other. To treat other people with respect [...] does not necessarily require that one suspends one's own commitment or distances oneself from one's own identity. Indeed, conversations are often more fruitful when people speak from their deepest selves (Carens 2000: 143).

iii. Encouraging a sense of belonging

As well as paying attention to these structural inequalities, fostering the conditions for multicultural integration and dialogue requires actively encouraging a sense of belonging. As Parekh notes, it is important that both private and public realms encourage intercultural interaction (Parekh 2000: 222). Within the public realm, it is important that there are representatives of minority groups within the major law and policy-making bodies and within the judiciary (Mason 1999: 282). However, accommodation of groups must go further than the adequate representation of minority communities.[44] As seen above, representatives may not be representative of

[44] For example, Andrew Mason points out that group representatives will regard themselves solely or primarily as defenders of the interests of their group and will not possess any overarching loyalty to the polity as a whole. This suggests that while it is important for members of minority groups to be included in decision-making bodies, they should not be conceived purely as representatives of their group (Mason 1999: 282-3).

certain sections within cultural groups, thus relying on representation of groups fails to reflect the diversity of opinion within them. The creation of separate institutions such as a Muslim parliament might have a homogenizing effect, requiring 'Muslims and their representatives to speak in one voice and to create a unified, hierarchical structure' (Modood 2005b: 5). In this way it could reinforce the hierarchical power structure within communities and close off avenues for competing interpretations to be heard. A "strong" multiculturalism is to be rejected on this ground, since it would require Muslims to speak with the voice of "the group". Parekh suggests there needs to be public forums in which other voices can be heard as well and through which cross-cultural dialogue can take place. Important to note is that the point of discourse is not always agreement; a lot is to be gained in the process. Dialogical encounters build up trust and a basis of mutual knowledge which makes it 'easier to bear the burden of occasional incomprehension and irritation inherent in most intercultural encounters' (Parekh 2000: 222, 306).

Parekh's vision of a truly multicultural society is one in which unity and diversity are not confined to the public and private realms respectively, but rather permeate all areas of life. Thus to return to the question of how to balance the demands of unity against those of diversity, the claim of multiculturalism is that the unity is 'embedded in and nurtured by its diversity'. Thus diversity does not lead to fragmentation and ghettoisation but rather to a multiculturally constituted common culture which forms

> the basis of a shared way of life [that] underpins and gives the state moral and emotional roots. The spirit of multiculturality flows freely through all areas of life and becomes such an integral part of citizens' self-understanding that they accept differences as an important and valuable feature of their society. The multiculturally constituted common culture fosters a common sense of belonging among citizens and provides a shared language and body of overlapping values growing out of, and sustained by, a dialogue between them (Parekh 2000: 224).

Modood suggests that part of this is the imperative to re-imagine or re-form our national identity, our Britishness, so that all can be part of it without having to deny or privatize other identities that are important to different Britons (Modood 2005: 18); thus to reject the 'cricket test' version of British identity. In the terms of world-travelling, focusing on cross-cultural dialogue means trying to overcome the construction of societies in ways which favour the dominant culture and to create the

conditions in which individuals are equipped for the "willing" activity of world-travelling and in which different groups can feel "at ease in a "world"" (Lugones 1987: 12).

Part of encouraging integration may be the need to foster a common culture. Care needs to be taken here, since, as cultures are fluid and changing, a project of cultural engineering would seem to fall to many of the objections of the multicultural protections of minority cultures that I have previously discussed. However, since cultural neutrality favours the majority culture, some level of encouraging a common culture might be justified on the basis that it promotes the norm of participatory parity that Fraser suggests (see chapter 1, section 3). Multicultural education can help foster cross-cultural understanding and encourage respect for others and sensitivity to different ways of life or sympathetic imagination. In Parekh's words, it fosters 'the ability to get under the skin of others and feel with and for them, the willingness to look at oneself from the standpoint of others, and the capacity to listen to them with sensitivity and sympathy' (Parekh 2000: 227).[45]

Conclusion

In conclusion, the rejection by universalist liberals, and within public debates, of multiculturalism *per se* as segregating and dividing society rests on an over-simplification of the project of multiculturalism. The version of multiculturalism I have been advocating seeks to create conditions in which a two-way integration can take place. Clearly many "multicultural" policies can do more harm than good. However, underestimating the importance of cultural ties is equally inadequate to the task of responding to the claims of diversity. The following chapter moves on to illustrate some of these points through the example of the attitudes and events surrounding the publication of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*.

[45] Parekh suggests a comprehensive range of strategies including the example set by public figures: official and unofficial spokespersons of the wider society should welcome the presence and contributions of different cultures, and be seen to attend social events and so on. He suggests that multicultural arts exhibitions, literary and musical events and film festivals, for instance, can help foster a multicultural ethos (Parekh 2000: 222-3).

CHAPTER 5

'The need for more than justice'[46]: cross-cultural communication and the "Rushdie affair"

Introduction

I have argued throughout that a multicultural dialogical approach is necessary in order to create the conditions in which a cross-cultural "fusion of horizons" can take place. This claim is developed in this chapter through an exploration of the events surrounding the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in 1988. In most cases in multicultural societies, differences in beliefs do not pose a political problem since a liberal society ensures a wide space in which different beliefs can be enjoyed. There are occasions, however, when beliefs appear incommensurable, or even hostile to each other. The clash over *The Satanic Verses*, or as it was dubbed "The Rushdie Affair", is an example of a multicultural dispute in which the identity of individuals as members of a group or religion came into direct conflict with the values of the dominant culture of society, complicated by the fact that the initial 'offensive' views were voiced by a westernised Indian. Here the minority, in this case the Muslims,[47] were asking the state for direct intervention to protect their religious sensibilities. This raises important questions for liberal theory concerning how far the liberal state should be sensitive to religious sensibilities which are in some ways contrary to traditional liberal norms, and how religious sensitivity is to be balanced against the value of freedom of expression and free speech.

The chapter argues however that approaching multicultural "clashes" from this liberal starting point pre-empts the terms of the debate and moulds the answers into a simplified framework of right and wrong in a way which precludes genuine understanding of what is at issue. I propose instead to explore this affair through the

[46] This is the title of a chapter in Annette Baier's *Moral Prejudices* (1995: 18-32).
[47] Werbner argues that these were on the whole British Pakistanis, as they felt most closely affected by Rushdie's actions, Rushdie being a Pakistani national now living in Britain (Werbner 1996: S56).

three steps of the world travelling methodology. Viewing cross-cultural disputes in which there is disagreement over values at a deep level in the light of the world travelling approach encourages us to seek solutions in understanding others. Instead of it being seen as a conflict in which one side wins and one side loses, this method is focused on the moral agents involved and on maintaining the connections between persons and groups, echoing the feminist perspective of the "ethic of care". The focus is on maintaining the conditions in which communication and a "fusion of horizons" can take place.

The chapter is divided into six sections. The first offers a general outline of the "Rushdie affair", before moving in section 2 to looking at the advantages that viewing the affair through the world travelling approach might have. Sections 3, 4, and 5, then address the affair through the three steps of the world travelling approach in turn. These assert respectively that in order to gain a fuller understanding it is necessary to look to one's own horizon, to look to the horizon of the other, and to see oneself as the other sees you. It is argued that approaching the affair through this perspective helps provide a more nuanced picture which overcomes the polarization of the debate into defenders of free speech and religious fundamentalists. Section 6 concludes by arguing that a focus on justice and principles is not enough, but must be accompanied by a more subtle, contextual approach which is centred on maintaining human connections and the conditions for cross-cultural communication.

1. The background

Protest began in India in September of 1988, even before the book was published. The book was banned there soon after. The outcry then spread to Britain, where members of Islamic organisations started a letter campaign to the publishers of the book and to the government. In October, the 'UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs' was formed with the express intention to 'combat the *fitna* [outrageous issue] and to guide the Muslim community in their efforts to express their anger and hurt, through democratic means, and to ensure that their protest stayed within the framework of the law' (Ahsan & Kidwai 1993: 27). At this stage, the demand by many was not for the book to be banned, but for the insertion of a statement that it was a work of fiction and did not give a historically accurate account of Islam (Parekh 1990: 75).

In December, frustrated by the government's lack of response and the book having been awarded the Whitbread monthly prize for fiction, the Muslim community in Bolton assembled a crowd of 7000 for a ritual burning of the book. This however barely attracted any media attention. It was not until the book was burned in Bradford in January 1989 that Westerners became outraged. This time there were only 1000 Muslim demonstrators, but local non-Muslim supporters attended, including politicians and the bishop of Bradford, which succeeded in ensuring wide press coverage (Pipes 2003: 23). The whole issue was further intensified and complicated by Ayatollah Khomeini pronouncing the notorious *fatwa* sentencing Rushdie to death and calling upon 'all zealous Muslims' to ensure that the sentence was carried out, promising martyrdom for anyone killed in the attempt (Jones 1990: 416).

In reply to Muslim outrage to the book, the liberal response was in general in full support of Rushdie and the value of free speech. Rushdie's own words are representative of many of the views expressed:

> What is freedom of expression? Without the freedom to offend, it ceases to exist. Without the freedom to challenge, even to satirize all orthodoxies, including religious orthodoxies, it ceases to exist. Language and the imagination cannot be imprisoned, or art will die, and with it, a little of what makes us human (Rushdie 1992: 396).

From the start the liberal response tended to label the Muslim objectors as fundamentalists and cast the debate in terms of enlightened liberalism versus a dogmatic, uncivilised religious fundamentalism. Modood writes that liberal intellectuals, while deploring the growing racism, saw the Rushdie affair as 'a call to arms on behalf of the Enlightenment' (Modood 1992: 260). To many on the liberal left, Muslims appeared illiterate, barbaric and anti-intellectual (Malik 1996: 76). Parekh writes that:

> The bulk of influential public opinion in Britain tends to dismiss most Muslims as fundamentalists and fundamentalism as a new form of barbarism. They are infantilised, ridiculed as illiterate peasants preferring the sleep of superstition to liberal light, and placed outside civilised discourse (Parekh in Appignanesi & Maitland 1990: 122).

This polarizing rhetoric of fundamentalism versus civilisation, the light versus the dark, is found (perhaps understandably) in Rushdie's own account of the dispute:

> Inside my novel, its characters seek to become fully human by facing up to the great facts of love, death, and (with or without God) the life of the soul. Outside it, the forces of inhumanity are on the march. "Battle lines are being drawn in India today," one of my characters remarks. "Secular versus religious, the light versus the dark. Better you choose which side you are on". Now that the battle has spread to Britain, I only hope it will not be lost by default. It is time for us to choose (Rushdie cited in Asad 1990: 243).

Modood points out that it was not only the white majority here that Muslims felt marginalized by, but also the London secular Asian intelligentsia who not only failed to attempt to act as intermediary and try to prevent a polarization between groups, but even 'joined the public vilification of Muslims'. They issued various collective declarations deploring the actions of 'fundamentalists', and set up groups with names such as 'Women against Fundamentalism'. This served to further reinforce the dismissive tactic that all angry Muslims were just extreme fundamentalists (Modood 1992: 270). However, this can equally be taken to serve as an important reminder that Muslim opinion was not divided between moderate Muslims who were angry but did not support the fatwa, and Muslims who were angry and did support the fatwa. It shows that there were also Muslims who were not angry! These individuals have an equal claim to represent Islamic tradition, as is suggested in the shout of the Women Against Fundamentalism demonstrating *against* the anti-Rushdie demonstration in London in 1989: 'Our tradition – resistance, not submission!' (Yuval-Davis 1997: 195). The point to note is that this position is equally valid in any attempt to engage with "how Muslims felt", and which is passed over in much of the "pro-Muslim" literature.

Also important to note is that the depiction of all anti-Rushdie Muslims as fundamentalists was not helped by the public response of many Muslims themselves, particularly the failure of Muslims to disassociate themselves from the Ayatollah's *fatwa* (Modood 1992: 260), and their response which was often reactionary, defensive and poorly argued. Many Muslim spokesmen accused Rushdie of the crime of apostasy, of turning one's back on Islam, which as liberal critics asserted, implies that no person has a right to change her mind or lose her faith (Parekh 1995: 307).

The Rushdie affair was a complicated dispute with strong feelings on both "sides". My argument is that the failure within the liberal mainstream community to engage to any deep extent with the opinion of the Muslim citizens, construing all objectors as "fundamentalists" and focusing purely on the challenge it presented to free speech made a difficult situation much worse. Much of the frustration within Muslim groups was due to the failure to get their voice across. The following sections explore how looking at this affair through the framework of the world travelling approach can shift the focus to a more sensitive understanding of what was at issue.

2. Applying the world travelling approach

The world travelling approach provides a useful perspective on the Rushdie affair because it offers a bridge between two "worlds". The worlds in question here are neither wholly distinct or closed off from each other, nor internally homogeneous. However, the recognition that our selves and others are embedded within what are to some degree distinct horizons, which provide the source of our deep assumptions, is necessary if more than superficial understanding is to be achieved.

Slightly adapted, the three steps to multicultural understanding on the world travelling view are: firstly, in order to understand the other we must understand our own embedded position; that we speak from within our own horizon. Unless we see our own world view as one amongst others, which are seen as different but not lesser (although this is not to rule out judgements that they might in fact be lesser), we cannot begin seriously to understand where the "other" is coming from. Unless this difference in outlook is understood, attempts at understanding are likely to result in condemnation and judgement. This first step then is closely intertwined with the second step which is that of attempting to understand the horizon of the other, or attentiveness to context. Labelling Muslims as "fundamentalists" without attempting to engage with what they were upset about and the particular context from which they spoke clearly added injury to insult. Finally, the third step teaches that in understanding, we must take account of how the "other" might see us. How the Muslims perceived the reaction of the mainstream towards *The Satanic Verses*, and

towards Muslims more widely, was an important factor in how their response was played out.

As discussed in chapter 3, the attitude of world travelling requires a "loving" or "playful" stance rather than one of "arrogant perception". Arrogant perception takes place when rather than seeking to achieve understanding of the interests, priorities, and perspective of another as that other understands them, we allow our own interests, priorities, and conceptions to determine how the other is perceived. By contrast, the playful stance of world travelling designates an open rather than a fixed stance towards understanding in which the goal is not to gain full intellectual control, but rather indicates a readiness to learn something about one's own self. If I start from a position which is already fixed, I cannot hope to understand the other party on their own terms, and they will appear only as a lesser version of myself. Understanding requires a metaphorical travelling to the other's "world", to engage with the sense of self of the other from within their world, and also to see how we are constructed in that world (Lugones 1987: 8). Importantly, this might entail a shift in our own position.

This can be compared with the notion of "appropriation" forwarded by Paul Ricoeur. For Ricoeur, understanding is an act which makes the object of interpretation our own. To appropriate is to make "one's own" what was "alien" (Ricoeur 1976: 43). This is seen as the counterpart of "distanciation", where the object to be understood is distanced from the original intentions or meanings, thus opening up the space for the surplus of meanings. In attempting to understand, we do not project ourselves onto the object, but rather through the process of appropriation, the subject discovers 'new modes of being' and gains new capacities for knowing herself (Ricoeur 1981: 192). 'To understand is not to project oneself into the text; it is to receive an enlarged self from the apprehension of proposed worlds which are the genuine object of interpretation' (Ricoeur 1981: 182-3). Thus we can expect to be changed in the encounter. Appropriation implies 'a moment of dispossession of the narcissistic *ego*' (Ricoeur 1981: 192). This can be seen to run parallel to the idea of "arrogant perception".

In the case of clashes over religious issues, part of identifying with the other requires that we acknowledge that our distinct horizons do not represent different points on the road to modernity, but rather exist simultaneously in different but equal spheres. Pnina Werbner argues that the clash over *The Satanic Verses* was neither that of an underprivileged underclass confronting the priests of an alien "high" culture, nor a clash between an antiquated morality and an enlightened aesthetic, but 'was, on the contrary, a clash between two distinct aesthetics and between two distinct moralities or world views. The confrontation was between *equal*, if disparate, aesthetic communities, each defending its own "high" culture' (Werbner 1996: 57).

The hasty rejection by many of the Muslim view as fundamentalist can be seen as a consequence of failing to understand the difference of the two outlooks in any deep sense. Instead, the underlying rhetoric of the debate casts "them", the Muslims, as uncivilised, pre-modern, even barbaric, in contrast with an "us" who are the opposite of all these. It is impossible to gain a proper understanding of the issue at hand unless we attend to the unexamined assumptions which shape each party's understanding of the other.

Investigating the Rushdie affair in the light of the world travelling approach is valuable for giving prominence to the complexities which are lost in its assessment purely by reference to abstract principles. Setting the terms of the debate as a choice between free speech and religious fundamentalism leaves little conceptual space for a discussion of the kinds of issues Muslims were keen to put on the public agenda (Parekh 2000: 303). A more contextual approach reveals that this is an example of a debate in which two far from homogenous "sides" both had good reasons for holding their positions. The discursive power of the majority is evident in the way in which the liberals were able not only to enforce their interpretations as the correct ones, but to make them appear self-evident. This closed off possibilities for cross-cultural debate and alienated and marginalized the Muslim community. Thus the "Rushdie Affair" is an example of communication in which the terms in which the debate was framed reflect the unequal position of the communities in question. It shows how what we do with words, our use of language, constructs the reality in which we speak.

Thus the recognition that is required here is not recognition of the Muslim's religious identity, but rather of how, as Muslims, they felt marginalized within society and felt alienated and powerless.

An impartial 'neutral' attitude fails to appreciate the extent to which the norms of one group are 'accepted as *the* local norms' (Horton 2003: 38). The power of the majority is *routinized* by the use of the language of the majority group as the standard language of use in society (Reid & Ng 1999: 121-2). Reid and Ng note that, when this occurs, 'the routine use of the imposed language in everyday life [serves] to further reinforce the dominance relation [by] making it appear natural' (Reid & Ng 1999: 122). This 'linguistic routinization of power' (Reid & Ng 1999: 122) makes it appear as universally valid, and anything else as not having reached this point of progress, rather than a different way of prioritising values. So, for instance, where the truth of freedom of expression and freedom of speech are taken as self-evident, it becomes very difficult for those who want to challenge the limits of these norms, and easy for their views to be dismissed as 'fundamentalist'.

Conflating the Muslim protest with the call for Rushdie's death effectively denied them their democratic voice as democratic citizens and missed the many thousands of Muslims living in the UK who as a general principle are in favour of freedom of speech but who felt genuine hurt at the treatment of the Prophet. The central point of this chapter is to highlight how the response of words in this case effectively forced the debate into two camps. What was an initially heterogeneous debate became quickly polarized and crystallized into two opposing "sides". The language used on both sides was a defining factor in shaping the space in which communication took place. The protests got ugly only when Muslims' views were not taken seriously. Denied the possibility of compromise in the public sphere, the demands of Muslims became more militant and the demands became harsher, leading to greater support for the *fatwa*. As the sides crystallized, the more moderate voices became silenced.

3. Seeing oneself in historical context

In the context of the Rushdie affair, the first step of seeing oneself in historical context points to the need for an awareness of how our own assumptions shape our

response. This might include recognising the assumptions in our secular world-views, as well as seeing how practices such as book burning also occur in "our own" context so are not easily dismissed as barbaric and "other", and understanding how our own fears might have shaped our interpretation of events.

The response of liberals in this affair can be seen to reflect their voluntarist conception of the individual and her cultural and religious attachments, and as part of the wider tendency to hold secular reason as the only serious form of reason. From the particularist perspective which takes culture seriously from the inside, it is clear that Muslims had legitimate reasons for their upset, which are not to be easily discarded as "fundamentalist". However this identification requires effort.

For example, Taylor notes how we can speak of people in other ages as holding opinions or subscribing to values whilst unaware of the generalized understanding of personal opinion held in our own society, or of how much the term "value" carries with it the sense of something chosen. The background understandings may be completely absent in other societies. It is only through the 'patient identification and undoing of those facets of our implicit understanding that distort the reality of the other' that we come to realise that the beliefs of others, in this case, deep religious beliefs, cannot be assimilated to our thinking about belief as personal opinion (Taylor 2002: 284-5). Taylor writes that we only ever attributed opinions to others

> because it seemed to go without saying that this is what it meant to have beliefs in certain areas. To get over the distortion, we had to see that there were other possibilities, that our way of being isn't the only or "natural" one, but that it represents one among other possible forms. We can no longer relate to our way of doing or construing things "naively," as just too obvious to mention (Taylor 2002: 295).

Thus our own position is changed, and we come to both understand our own peculiarity and to respect the reality of the other; we come to see difference as actual and fundamental, others are not simply a more backward, less modern version of ourselves. The crucial moment occurs when 'the difference escapes from its categorization as an error, a fault, or a lesser, undeveloped version of what we are, and challenges us to see it as a viable human alternative' (Taylor 2002: 296). It is something like this that is required for a "fusion of horizons".

Exploring one's own horizon can help in this process. Amongst others, there are two important features with regards to the Rushdie affair to be noted here. The first involves recognising that the behaviour of protestors, for instance, in publicly burning the novel, and their demands to restrict freedom of speech, are not alien to our own history. For example, the book burners were viciously attacked for behaving like Nazis. Parekh cites Anthony Burgess of *The Independent* who compared Muslims to Nazis who 'shame' Britain 'through the vindictive agency of bonfires' (Parekh 1990: 78). However, book burning is not unheard of in British society and, similarly, Christians burned copies of the Beatles records after John Lennon said in an interview that they were more popular than Christ. Furthermore, Christians in Britain have objected to depictions of Jesus in films and have recently objected to his portrayal in the Jerry Springer musical. As late as the 1960s there was a strict protocol governing the depiction of Jesus in films and it was considered disrespectful to portray his face on the screen (Parekh 1990: 88). *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1935), *Quo Vadis* (1951) *and Ben Hur* (1959) show Jesus only from afar and feature only his hand or foot (Parekh 1990: 88). The point here is that it is in our own recent history as well.

Secondly, the extremeness of the liberal mainstream reaction must be seen against the context of its own fears and the context of the general feeling of many in Britain at the time. Talal Asad makes the important point that the 'moral panic' amongst the British was largely due to the feeling that British identity was under threat from a religious minority whose source of authority was found externally to Britain, in its own strongly held religious traditions, and that appears to threaten the ideological unity of the state (Asad 1993: 267-8). This is reflected in the newspapers, several of which wondered if Britain had not made a 'mistake' in 'letting in' too many Muslims, and even in the opinion of Roy Jenkins, father of the Race Relations Act of 1976, who lamented that 'we might have been more cautious' about allowing the creation of a substantial Muslim community in Britain (Parekh 1990: 79). As Parekh points out, the protest over *The Satanic Verses* emerged into a context where, thanks to

> the painful historical memories of religious wars during the early modern period, many Britons were deeply suspicious of the political role of religion and the religiously inspired restrictions on free speech. And thanks to the recent events in some Muslim countries, they also deeply

> feared the militancy of the Muslims settled in their midst (Parekh 2000: 310).

For many, the events surrounding the publication of *The Satanic Verses* are proof that multiculturalism isn't working in precisely the way discussed in the previous chapter. The newspapers, including the liberal, all 'debated whether British society had an obligation to tolerate the intolerant and whether multiculturalism was not a dangerous doctrine' (Parekh 1990: 79). For example a *Guardian* editorial asked Muslims to recognise they were living in a secular society and that they must change their ways of thought and life (Parekh 1990: 79). Initial peaceful protests were all but ignored, until the burning of the book. Not giving Muslim protestors a public forum only increased their sense of powerlessness. Ahmed writes that Muslims were 'constantly on the defensive. Every time they opened their mouth to say that they had been hurt by *The Satanic Verses* they were dismissed as "fundamentalists"' (Ahmed 1996: S70). The press unintentionally united an initially heterogeneous Muslim community which 'created a new orthodoxy, and made support for the *fatwa* a badge of Muslim identity and solidarity' (Parekh 2000: 300).

In his discussion of the Rushdie Affair, Brian Barry argues that 'mocking, ridiculing and lampooning' religious beliefs is acceptable because

> [r]eligious fanaticism is whipped up by non-rational means, and the only way in which it is ever likely to be counteracted is by making people ashamed by it. If Christianity has in the past fifty years finally become compatible with civility (at least in most of Western Europe), that is the long-term consequence of an assault on its pretensions (Barry 2001: 31).

Thus not only are objectors to *The Satanic Verses* religious fanatics, but Islam (and Christianity outside of Western Europe) are uncivilised. Painting in such broad brush strokes effectively puts all Muslims who were upset about the novel in the same category as the Ayatollah.

The conceptualisation of the Muslim upset as fundamentalism did not confine itself even to the episode of *The Satanic Verses*, but was often expanded to include Islamic culture as a whole. For example, one of Rushdie's supporters, the 'liberal' writer Fay Weldon wrote that '[t]he bible, in its entirety, is at least food for thought. The Koran

is food for no-thought. It is not a poem on which society can be safely or sensibly based' (Weldon 1989: 6).

4. Attentiveness to context – engaging with the horizon of the other party

An understanding of the way our own horizon informs our interpretations of events is inseparable from engagement with the horizon and context from which the other speaks. This step requires engaging with *why* Muslims reacted to *The Satanic Verses* as they did, and understanding the marginalized context from which they spoke.

Muslims were outraged by the novel and in particular by what they saw as 'a straightforwardly personal attack' on Mohammed (Akhtar 1990: 13). The parts of the book Muslims felt so upset about take part in the dream sequence of one of the leading characters, Gibreel Farishta (Gabriel the Angel). These dreams tell the story of the Prophet Mahound – Mahound being, as Rushdie explains in the book, a derogatory name for Muhammad in the Christian Middle Ages, meaning medieval baby-frightener. This name arose because, to the medieval mind, the phenomenal military success of the new faith of Islam could be explained only as being the work of the Devil (Akhtar 1990: 9). Rushdie's justification for using the name Mahound is as follows: 'To turn insults into strengths, whigs, tories, and blacks all chose to wear with pride the names that were given them in scorn; likewise our mountain-climbing prophet-motivated solitary is to be the medieval baby-frightener. The Devil's synonym: Mahound' (*Satanic Verses* 93).

Muslims saw the book as ''abusive', 'insulting', 'scurrilous', 'vilificatory' in its treatment of men and women whom Muslims considered holy and of whose sacred memories they considered themselves custodians' (Parekh 1995: 307). To give one such passage they found obscene:

> Amid the palm-trees of the oasis Gibreel appeared to the Prophet and found himself sprouting rules, rules, rules, until the faithful could scarcely bear the prospect of any more revelation... rules about every damn thing, if a man farts let him turn his face to the wind, a rule about which hand to use for the purpose of cleaning one's behind. It was as if no aspect of human existence was to be left unregulated, free. The revelation – the *recitation* – told the

> faithful how much to eat, how deeply they should sleep, and which sexual positions had received divine sanction (*SV* 363-4).

The passage continues at length, listing just what sexual positions are approved or forbidden by the archangel, what parts of the body might be scratched, permitted and forbidden subjects of conversation, and so on.

The title of the novel refers to an account of an alleged incident in which the 53rd chapter of the Qur'an is recited by the devil. This manipulation the Prophet Muhammad is unable to detect and so recites the 'Satanic Verses' in his prayers for some time before the Angel Gabriel appears to him one evening and, rebuking the Prophet for his mistake, changes the satanic verses for more appropriate ones (Ahsan & Kidwai 1993: 28-29). Thus it effectively questions the belief that the Qur'an is revelation directly from God, un-tampered with by man or anything else. The translation of "verses" in Arabic, Persian and Turkish refers specifically to "verses of the Qur'an", and thus the title of the book, when translated, implies that the entire Qur'an was received from the devil, and not just the offending "Satanic Verses". Thus the title itself becomes deeply blasphemous and helps explain the widespread Muslim reaction against the book, amongst those who had never seen a copy, let alone read it (Pipes 2003: 117).

For the Muslim, Muhammad is held in the highest possible esteem. The crime of insulting the Prophet is one of the most unforgivable in Islamic law (Easterman 1992: 90) (hence the outrage recently directed against the Danish cartoonist). Whilst Muhammad is not divine, no pictorial representations are allowed of him and mention of his name warrants (among the pious at least) the invocation of divine blessing upon him, his family and his companions (Akhtar 1990: 2). Followers are obliged to imitate him daily in every aspect of their lives. As Easterman notes, since Islam is not just a religion, but an all-embracing way of life, Muslims have not just been able to adapt their secular behaviour without necessarily contravening their religious beliefs as Christians have been able to do (Easterman 1992: 91).

Modood writes that, while Rushdie has argued that the *mullahs* whipped up the ordinary Muslims for their own political motives, the truth is that:

> all the religious zealots had to do was simply quote from *SV* for anger, shame and hurt to be felt. It is important to be clear that *SV* was not objected to as an intellectual critique of their faith (libraries are full of those); for the average Muslim the vulgar language, the explicit sexual imagery, the attribution of lustful motives – without any evidence – to the holy Prophet, in short the reduction of their religion to a selfish sexual appetite was no more a contribution to literary discourse than pissing upon the Bible is a theological argument (Modood 1992: 269).

Modood makes the important point that there is a strong tradition of questioning and dissent within Islam – thus protest is not to be easily discarded as a fundamentalist rejection of any questioning of their religion. The depiction in the novel of the sexual behaviour of the Prophet was felt as a deliberately provocative sneer, and the novel's passages on the rise of Islam and the Prophet were felt as deliberately intended to lampoon their beliefs and practices (Van der Veer 1997: 101-2). This was further compounded by the fact that Rushdie wrote 'with an insider's awareness of the outrage such a portrayal would cause' (Akhtar 1990: 15). As a Muslim and a scholar of Islam, Muslims felt that Rushdie should be defending them, or at least not joining in the vilification of Muslims. This feeling is expressed by Edward Said:

> Above all... there rises the question that people from the Islamic world ask: Why must a Moslem, who could be defending and sympathetically interpreting us, now represent us so roughly, so expertly and so disrespectfully to an audience already primed to excoriate our tradition, reality, history, religion, language and origins? Why, in other words, must a member of our culture join the legions of orientalists in orientalising Islam so radically and so unfairly? (Said in Appignanesi & Maitland 1990: 165).

The point is, not that this offence is enough to get the book banned in a liberal state, let alone enough to condemn a man to death, but rather that, with a little effort, it is not hard to see why Muslims were upset. Refusing to engage with this on the grounds that the content is irrelevant to the question of free speech appears merely dogmatic when faced with actual persons with a legitimate grievance.

Freedom of speech, while a crucial value and fundamentally important to liberal democracies, is not absolute. There are many occasions in which free speech might rightfully be limited. These limits are dictated by the possible harm caused to the self-respect and dignity of individuals and groups, as well as to social harmony. The

notion of harm is subjective, and will be understood in different ways in different cultural contexts (Ruthven 1990: 156). The fact that the Muslim opinion was not taken seriously in this case appeared to Muslims as displaying a certain bias on the part of the liberals: had the work in question been taken to be insulting to Jews, for instance, it surely would not have found the absolute support it did. Furthermore, we might not feel the same way about a jokey treatment of Anne Frank or a musical comedy about the sex lives of Martin Luther King (Leo in Appignanesi & Maitland 1990: 251). Ahmad Sadri observes that 'an *absolute* decision in Rushdie's favor by Western observers may be due to cultural distance more than anything else' (Sadri 1994: 179, italics added). It is here that something like the act of "world" travelling is required.

Therefore, understanding how far we should entertain claims for the restriction of free speech is informed by the particular context. As Rushdie himself writes in an essay in his excellent *Imaginary Homelands* collection:

> works of art, even works of entertainment, do not come into being in a social and political vacuum; and... the way they operate in a society cannot be separated from politics, from history. For every text, a context (Rushdie 1992: 92).

Further on in the same essay, which is critical of British television depictions of India, he writes: 'What I am saying is that politics and literature, like sport and politics, do mix, are inextricably mixed, and that that mixture has consequences' (Rushdie 1992: 100). As Parekh argues, there are certain contexts, such as countries with a long history of inter-ethnic violence, or in which religion means a great deal to its members or where some groups are systematically humiliated, where free speech would be rightly subject to greater constraints than elsewhere (Parekh 2000: 320).

As well as engaging with why Muslims were so upset by the book, it is also necessary to understand how their present situation informed their position. The dispute over *The Satanic Verses* in Britain must be seen against the context of the position of Muslims as an already vulnerable minority "community". Van der Veer contends that '[t]hese immigrants, who are already socially and culturally marginalised, are thus doubly marginalised in the name of an attack on 'purity' and Islamic

'fundamentalism'' (Van der Veer 1997: 101). Since most are of South Asian or Arab descent, many Muslims have to contend with discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity quite apart from on religious or cultural grounds. Paul Weller points out that this discrimination 'starts with differential treatment at the point of entry to the country as compared with that accorded to white immigrants' from Canada, Australia and so on (Weller 1990: 38). Echoing Modood's point discussed in the previous chapter, Malik points out that in Britain, the Muslim community were confronted with 'a double [edged] sword of racism and anti-Muslim animus' (Malik 1996: 76). Akbar Ahmed argues that '[t]he furore is to be viewed in the context of worsening race relations, the fear of immigrants in the majority population and the rising Islamophobia and the fear of racist violence in the minorities' (Ahmed 1996: 70).

The inequality of power between minority and majority was reflected in the unequal access of both to the media, which in turn exacerbated the situation further. The way in which the affair was presented to the public inevitably reflected the power dynamic involved since all coverage was reported by newspapers and television channels that were invariably controlled by non-Muslims, invariably supporters of Rushdie and "free speech" and this was reflected in their coverage of the affair.

The sense of marginalization and powerlessness was exacerbated further by the existence of blasphemy laws which covered only Christianity and were not extended to Islam or other religions. Werbner observes that

> [a]nger at the book was magnified by the anomalies of religious minority citizenship it revealed: on the one hand, diasporic Muslims were constrained by the laws of their adopted land; on the other hand, the publication of the novel revealed that the law was discriminatory and protected only Christian feelings of offence (Werbner 1996: 58).

Denied the right held by Christians of seeking redress in the courts when they feel that their faith is being maligned, Muslims at the same time faced criticism for resorting to book-burnings and street demonstrations, when other possibilities seemed closed to them (Weller 1990: 40).

5. Seeing oneself as the "other" sees you

The third step in the world travelling approach contends that we are unable to reach an understanding of that which is at issue unless we take into account not only the context of the other, but of how each party views the other. This is particularly important in the case of the Rushdie affair, since much of the debate, and certainly the way in which it spiralled, can be seen as tied up with the response of the other, and in particular with what was *perceived* as the other's response to them.

Muslims saw the book as degrading and demeaning them in others' eyes. Parekh sums up this feeling among Muslims:

> It reinforced many of the prejudices created against them by the Orientalists and gave grounds for a few more into the bargain. It made them objects of ridicule and presented them as barbarians following a fraudulent religion created by a cunning manipulator and devoid of a sound system of morality (Parekh 1995: 308).

In this case, what was important was not just how the Muslims saw the mainstream community, but more pertinently, what they perceived to be the mainstream perception of *them*. Pnina Werbner argues that

> Pakistanis in Britain, and many Muslims worldwide, responded to the novel in a politically violent manner out of a sense of deep offence, a conviction that the novel was enjoyed by Westerners because it was an attack on Islam and its values (Werbner 1996: 69).

Protest over the book was played out against the background of Muslim memories of centuries of European Islamophobia, colonialism and racism and their current experiences of demonization and marginalization, and saw the favourable British reception of *The Satanic Verses* as further proof of this (Parekh 2000: 310). Malik argues that 'an overwhelming feeling of disgust with Western indifference to Muslim sensitivities' played a crucial role in the affair (Malik 1996: 76). Many Muslims saw the response of the majority as one of contempt, which was in many cases correct, as Taylor points out (Taylor 1994: 63).

Werbner suggests that there is a triple hermeneutic at work here. Not only should we take into account what Rushdie thought he was doing with the book, and what the book means to its readers, we should also take into account what the book's readers, Muslims and non-Muslims, believe about their *counterparts'* interpretations (Werbner 1996: S55). Therefore Werbner contends that, when considering the meanings of words and the images these words conjure up, the question of whom these are meanings *for* is important:

> That, of course, is the key question. The Rushdie affair was not simply an instantiation of a double hermeneutic—it was an example of a triple hermeneutic leading towards an infinitely regressing hermeneutic. We ask not simply how the author interprets Islam, what the book means to its readers, but what his readers, Muslims and non-Muslims, believe about their *counterparts'* interpretations (Werbner 1996: S55).

At the very least then we might concede that Muslims express a legitimate worry that it might further misunderstanding of Islam. Much of the source of the upset would appear to be in how closely it resembles actual events and characters in Islamic history, thus it was seen as 'a wholly 'untruthful' account of Islam [which] spread 'utter lies' about it. Had the book not stayed so recognizably close to history the 'gross inaccuracies' would not have mattered' (Parekh 1995: 307). Whilst the offending passages take place within a dream sequence, the dichotomy between reality and fiction is successfully challenged enough by Rushdie for the non-Muslim reader to take parts as offering an accurate portrayal of Islam and the Koran. This is compounded by the fact that there are few alternative portrayals of Islam prominent in the West. Edward Said writes that

> Most Moslems think of the current situation between their community and Western civilization in singularly unhappy terms. How many Islamic writers, Moslems say, from Egypt, Iraq, Palestine, Pakistan or Senegal are published, much less known or read, in the West? And why is that ignorance there, if not for the disregard, indifference and fear with which things Islamic are considered here? (Said in Appignanesi & Maitland 1990: 165).

The point for me is that the existence of this polemical tradition and anti-Muslim feeling is not irrelevant to assessing Muslim claims. *The Satanic Verses* did not arrive into a political vacuum, but into a political context, one feature of which being somewhat delicate relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. Thus the

defensiveness of Muslims is somewhat understandable, seen, in Akhtar's view, as part of one-and-a-half millennia of Western animosity towards their Prophet (Akhtar 1992: 7). Easterman points out that writers, academics, and painters have all contributed to a potent and enduring image of Islamic decadence, brutality, sensuality, exoticism and irrationality, part of a strategy of *Orientalism* which sought to control, encapsulate and above all stereotype Muslims in order to justify their subjection to Western physical and mental superiority (Easterman 1992: 90).

Malik observes that '[l]ong-time mis-images of Muhammad as an anti-Christ and of Muslims as bloodthirsty and intolerant crowds of book-burners were invoked' (Malik 1996: 76). Similarly, Talal Asad perceives *The Satanic Verses* as 'a weapon...wielded in the presence of a post-Christian audience—indeed with the seduction of that audience as a primary aim—it draws astutely on the long tradition of Christian anti-Muslim polemics' (Asad 1990: 252).

Since Muslims interpreted the novel as an attack on Islam and its values, they tended to see the defence of it as similarly an attack – that Westerners enjoyed the attack. Pnina Werbner argues one way of diffusing this would be by engaging in debate about the real meaning of the text (Werbner 1996: 69). Werbner writes that:

> However serious our disagreements over the interpretation of the novel may be, an argument about interpretation shifts the terms of the debate to ethical and aesthetic issues. This is a critical shift away from paternalistic coercion towards a politics of recognition and cultural dignity (Werbner 1996: 69).

Amongst other things, offering different interpretations would challenge the conviction held by many Muslims, that since *The Satanic Verses* was (perceived as) an attack on Islam, Western support for Rushdie therefore also amounted to an attack. Werbner argues that it 'is therefore *politically* necessary and expedient to demonstrate that from a Western perspective, the novel can be read quite differently, as a serious attempt to explore the possibility of a liberal more "open" Islam rather than as a mockery' (Werbner 1996: 69). With her interpretation of it as a serious exploration of a moderate, tolerant Islam, she hopes to challenge Muslims 'to recognise the *possibility* of an alternative interpretation of the novel within a non-realist Western aesthetic tradition' (Werbner 1996: 82). Werbner argues that persuading Muslim

critics that the book bears a positive message about Islam would reduce the sense of offence Muslims have come to live with and would help moderate Muslims who seek to create bridges across the rupture caused by the affair (Werbner 1996: 82).[48] Ultimately her interpretation is unconvincing, and her point that this could provide an 'objective' interpretation which could be accepted by Muslims as well even more so. However, her overall point is valuable and might be interpreted as saying that, if a dialogue is to work, there needs to be some engagement with the horizon of the other *on both sides*, and an expectation that one's own position may be altered as a result. For Muslims, this requires a recognition that there is another way to view the book, i.e. that the "West" can enjoy it without mocking Islam. For Western defenders of Rushdie, this requires recognising that the Muslim rejection of the novel is not just an example of fundamentalism, but comes out of a different, but equally valid, world view.

6. A contextual dialogical approach

The point of looking at this affair through the three steps of the world travelling approach is that it allows for a shift away from the terms used by the mainstream community (in this case the boundaries and value of free speech), to a widened perspective which takes account also of the reasons of the other. This is a useful exercise since the dominant position of the majority allows it to shape the structure of the debate in ways that are not obvious. The starting point of multicultural sensitivity of the world travelling approach does not lead to the conclusion that the book should have been banned (though there might be good reasons for suggesting this), but rather focuses on opening rather than closing the space for cross-cultural communication, both over the particular issue at hand and, through building and maintaining a relationship of trust and understanding with Muslim citizens, in subsequent cross-cultural relations.

What was legitimate questioning of the boundaries of important values was discarded as "fundamentalism". Modood argues that the Muslim response to *The Satanic Verses*

[48] Werbner also notes that this would also cast doubt on the Islamic legal case for the author's death sentence (Werbner 1996: 82). This point seems somewhat troublesome from a moral point of view although pragmatically it might add to the tools at the disposal of moderate Muslims in dialogue with literalist interpreters of the Koran.

had in fact very little to do with fundamentalism which is virtually non-existent among Asian Muslims and played an insignificant part in the demonstrations: it is rather 'an incontrovertible fact that the demonstrations and the book-burnings were above all spontaneous working-class anger and hurt pride' (Modood 1992: 261, 265). The anger against *The Satanic Verses* didn't have to be manipulated by fundamentalists – virtually every practising Muslim was offended by passages and furthermore shocked that it was written by a fellow Muslim of whom the Asian community had been until that point proud (Modood 1992: 269). Stereotyping Muslim protesters as fundamentalists delegitimized their point and obscured the validity of a debate which was, in Modood's view, essentially about 'the rights of non-European religious and cultural minorities in the context of a secular hegemony' (Modood 1992: 74). The fact that the denigrators of *The Satanic Verses* were British democratic citizens, most of whom sought to challenge its publication on liberal democratic grounds, was almost completely obscured.

The failure to engage with the hurt of British Muslims led to the mainstream community tying the argument of the minority to at best, a rejection of the freedom of expression and freedom of speech *per se*, at worst, a rejection of all fundamental British values and a promotion of the Ayatollah's *fatwa*. As I argued in the previous chapter, it is this type of move which is likely to make groups more insular, less willing to define their identities in plural terms. Questioning can take place when individuals feel secure in their identities; events *turn* people into cultural essentialists. This lack of understanding polarized the debate, undermining connections between people and reinforcing difference. Branding challenges to mainstream values carried out through democratic means as fundamentalist encouraged alienation and thus an insular character within minority groups. The fact that Muslims did not have participatory parity in the public sphere meant that they didn't voice their concerns properly and became defensive, thus further polarizing the debate and adding to the lack of understanding all round which was harmful to the relationship between Muslims and the wider community more generally.

It is clear that the terms used to frame multicultural debates can be vastly unhelpful here, even those used in positions which are sympathetic to multiculturalism. For example, Charles Taylor writes that, in the Rushdie controversy 'compromise is close

to impossible... one either forbids murder or allows it' (Taylor 1994: 63). Taylor asserts that our response 'must be' "This is how we do things here", 'where "how we do things" covers issues such as the right to life and to freedom of speech' (Taylor 1994: 63). However, this worryingly removes the terms of the dispute from the hands of ordinary British Muslims and casts it entirely in the terms set by Khomeini and his supporters. Tying the defence of the novel to the British way of life, 'the way we do things here', reinforces the position of British Muslims as 'outsiders' and thus constrains the sense in which they can simultaneously hold the British and the Islamic aspects of their identity.

The Rushdie affair raises exactly the kinds of questions that are the focus of the debate on "multiculturalism" today. Asad contends that the Rushdie affair 'helped to promote a new discourse on Britishness' which saw renewed calls for assimilation and a 'general chorus about the need to teach South Asians how to be properly British' (Asad 1993: 266). Muslims were 'constantly reminded of the terms of engagement between immigrants and the host society', and that by coming to settle in Britain, they had consented to its way of life and must respect and abide by its laws, norms and values (Parekh 1995: 310).

The argument of this chapter is that the focus within multicultural societies should be on fostering and maintaining the kind of conditions in which fruitful dialogue can take place. It is the kind of discomfort, but also the creativity, that comes with translation across borders that is occupying Rushdie in the novel. As he writes:

> I wanted to write a novel which at its most fundamental level is about metamorphis – the nature of it, the process by which it happens, its effect on the metamorphosed self and on the world around it, and its link with the act of travelling. Not least because the pressures exerted by migration are one of the classic contemporary locations of metamorphosis – what I call 'translation': a carrying across of the self into another place and another language.
>
> I am fascinated by how the classic roots of the self in language, society and place are disrupted by the act of migration: you suddenly find yourself in a new culture with different rules, and a new language, and for a while you flounder. The self is forced to find different principles on which to

> invent itself. That's what I was really trying to write about (Rushdie cited in Parekh 1990: 72).[49]

The idea of world travelling or Gadamer's fusion of horizons is that it opens the way for description which is neither in their terms nor ours, but in a new and shared language from which ideally all may be enriched.

There are extremely good reasons for rejecting the claim that *The Satanic Verses* be banned. Parekh's assertion that it is not criticism of their religion that Muslims are averse to, just the offensive treatment of it appears somewhat naïve. He is right that it is about causing offence, but what counts as offence? Offence is dangerously subjective. For example, it can be said that outsiders necessarily give offence, just by the mere fact of implicitly rejecting their truth by remaining outsiders (Easterman 1992: 91). What I have tried to demonstrate is not that *The Satanic Verses* should have been banned, or even that Rushdie should have exercised some self-censorship, but simply that, through a contextual analysis of the affair, it is clear that both sides had good reasons for the position they took. Simply acknowledging this and giving space for expression on both "sides" would have gone a long way to preventing the polarizing of the debate and damaging the relations between the two communities.

John Horton makes an important point with respect to finding "solutions" for multicultural dilemmas. He points out that it is a possibility, all too often neglected by liberal political theorists, that there *are* no solutions that can be accepted by all: 'we may face situations in which there are a variety of legitimate concerns that cannot be reconciled, either in theory or practice, in a way that is fair to all' (Horton 2003: 39). That if we decide not to accommodate the particular claims of a cultural or religious group for what we see to be good reasons, it is still important 'to acknowledge the real possibility... that their motivating sense of grievance may still have legitimacy... A sense of unfairness, or being hard done by, may legitimately persist in the minority, and can be accepted as justified by the rest of us' (Horton 2003: 39). The point of discourse need not be only to reach consensus, there is much to be gained simply through the taking part in consensual dialogue that can make the need for resolution

[49] Parekh cites this from Rushdie, 'Between God and Devil', in *The Bookseller*, 31 March 1989.

itself less urgent.[50] In the debate over *Satanic Verses*, things eventually calmed down and members of the two communities began to rethink their respective positions. As Parekh writes, '[w]hile this made the debate *possible*, it also removed the sense of urgency and rendered the debate or at least its resolution *unnecessary*' (Parekh 2000: 304). Simply through the act of recognition of the viability of the other's position, the option of using discourse to resolve multicultural discourse is left open.

What is crucial in this affair is to recognise that there was not a stark choice between championing the right to freedom of expression on the one hand (which meant not banning the book) and giving in to religious sensibilities of the other (which meant banning the book). The kind of 'moral panic' which set in when the debate was viewed in these terms was way out of proportion to the demands being made by moderate British Muslim citizens. This helped crystallize the debate into two poles, increasing alienation between groups and leaving little room for imaginative compromise. Much of the problem was the lack of a public forum in which Muslims voices could be heard, leading to a sense of frustration and alienation. Just taking Muslim views seriously would have taken much of the heat out of the debate. Practical gestures that could have been considered include that the book carry a historical disclaimer as many had first demanded. On the view I have forwarded, this need not have been seen as 'giving ground to the fundamentalists'.

An impartial liberalism working with abstract principles of freedom of expression is wrongly positioned for a focus also on maintaining and developing the conditions for effective cross-cultural dialogue. Applying abstract rules is unable to respond to the ways in which what happens in one dispute is carried over into future relations. The view that principles should be accompanied by a focus on particularism and maintaining conditions for dialogue relates to the feminist insight that as well as an 'ethic of justice', there can also be discerned an 'ethic of care'.[51] On this model, rather than asserting abstract moral principles in concrete cases, one's 'moral imagination,

[50] A "consensus" might simply indicate the successful wielding of power by one group over another.

[51] It must be noted that the focus of ethic of care theorists is somewhat different, being more that of how this different voice has been excluded and how the activity of care, which has usually been undertaken by women, has been devalued in consequence. Those inspired by the insights of Carol Gilligan have argued that 'the inherited concepts of modern moral philosophy are indelibly marked by the exclusion of women from positions of public authority and by the cultural devaluation of the work of caring performed by women in their families and local communities' (Wright 2004: 49).

character, and actions must respond to the complexity of a given situation' (Tronto 1987: 657-8). Viewed from a moral standpoint of care, participants in the debate should seek to respond in ways which, to use Carol Gilligan's phrase, 'would sustain rather than sever connection' (Gilligan 1982: 48). For Gilligan, simply applying universal norms would fail to attend to the particular and contextually nuanced characteristics of both the circumstances that demanded a moral response as well as the decisions appropriate to the particular circumstances (Gilligan 1982).

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that a contextual response is better able to respond to the complexities of multicultural dilemmas than one which applies abstract liberal principles, and thus that it is better able to develop and maintain the conditions for a "fusion of horizons". I have attempted to illustrate this through the approach of "world travelling", the central insight of which is that an adequate understanding of that which is at issue requires engagement both with the horizon of the other, and with the assumptions and prejudices which inform our interpretations.

This does not suggest a slide into moral relativism. Not all events, practices or beliefs in our own or another culture perhaps "deserve" to be the subject of appropriation. However, in a multicultural dispute such as that over *The Satanic Verses* where a large number of citizens voiced their protest, judgements should not be made without close contextual engagement. This is necessary in order to keep the space for expansive conceptions of hybrid identities, and to maintain and foster conditions for cross-cultural dialogue, out of which, in Rushdie's phrase, "newness can enter the world".

CHAPTER 6

"Women and Culture": Contested meanings and the "social imaginary"

Introduction

I have been defending a type of dialogical multiculturalism that recognises the intersubjectivity of meaning and thus the need for engagement with particular contexts. However, since cultures are not self-contained moral universes, the fact that we all speak from a position of "rootedness" does not replace the need for normative reasoning. The final two chapters can be seen as exploring in greater depth the tensions involved here between the universal and the particular and in mediating a path between them; in other words, the difficulties involved in working out a "situated universalism".

The present chapter takes up the criticism that a move toward "cultural sensitivity" usually takes place at the expense of the most vulnerable within cultures. This is the paradox of multicultural vulnerability discussed in the first chapter: that multicultural policies which are focussed on inequalities *between* groups can in fact reinforce patterns of oppression *within* groups. It is usually women who are most vulnerable to the manifestations of the paradox, which provides the focus for this chapter.

I argue that since cultures are not homogeneous, taking the voice of some as representative of the culture does potentially entrench the powerlessness of the most vulnerable within the group and therefore it is crucial that "identity claims" are not just taken at face value. However, working out these problems through appeal to abstract "universal" standards with little reference to the internal meanings of cultural and religious practices and beliefs can do more harm than good. The argument is then that we still need to take a dialogical multicultural approach, yet that this should not be seen as in tension with the universal. If the focus is on cultures as multistranded and internally diverse and changeable, containing multiple competing interpretations,

a situated approach can avoid being culturally conservative. If we start off with the discursive argument over norms found within cultures, we can model a situated ethics which is robust enough to discriminate between positions, just as we find individuals striving to balance the various and often contrasting commitments within their cultures.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section begins by outlining what Ayelet Shachar calls the 'paradox of multicultural vulnerability' before moving on to look at why it is usually women who are most vulnerable to the manifestations of the paradox and thus at why cultural demands are to be viewed with suspicion. The second section turns to argue that feminist universalists such as Okin fail to take sufficient account of context and characterise "other" cultures in static terms, thus obscuring the extent to which women within them are active players within their cultures. By failing to look in close detail at cultural practices and the contestation surrounding them, liberal feminists such as Okin too readily conclude that cultures themselves are patriarchal and oppressive of women. When closer attention is paid to the meanings and interpretations within cultures, the ground is opened up on which women's rights can be defended within situated contexts rather than imposing abstract notions which fail to resonate with local norms and understandings. This is explored in the third section. The cultural need not be juxtaposed against the universal, but rather the space of contested norms within cultures, or what Gatens calls the social imaginary, can provide a middle ground for negotiation between universal rights and cultural norms. The final section draws out some implications of how a dialogical multiculturalism, informed by the theoretical viewpoint of hermeneutical world travelling, is better suited than a universalist approach to the subtleties involved in finding a balance between the fact of our rootedness on the one hand, and our connectedness on the other.

1. Women and culture

The caution that multicultural accommodations may leave groups within groups in a vulnerable position, and may undermine the dynamic of change within cultures is found in many examples of recent political theory. Shachar terms this the "paradox of multicultural vulnerability", referred to in chapter 1. The basic argument is that well-

meaning accommodations 'may leave certain group members vulnerable to maltreatment within the group, and may, in effect, work to reinforce some of the most hierarchical elements of a culture' (Shachar 2000: 65). The argument is that a multicultural politics, which works with groups as well as individuals, is dependent on an exaggerated view of the cohesion of "cultures" – hence claims to special rights and exemptions made on the basis of cultural identity in fact express the desires of cultural elites. In consequence, while seeking to overcome relations of domination *between* dominant and minority cultures, multicultural accommodations fail to be sufficiently attentive to relations of domination *within* groups and thus leave minorities within minorities vulnerable. Claims for group rights tend to reflect the internal power lines within the group since the self-proclaimed leaders are unlikely to be representative of all or even most of the group members (Okin 1999: 121). If multicultural accommodation is justified in terms of its promoting 'inclusion and participation' of cultural groups without requiring them to shed their distinct identities (Shachar 2000: 66), then we might say that the danger is that multicultural accommodations can grant elites within groups power to *ex*clude and *restrict* participation, and to impose and enforce identities.

While not exclusively a problem for women, policies which afford protection to cultural practices are likely to impact proportionately more on women and girls because of the way in which cultures regulate the private arena, in most cultures traditionally the domain of women. Multicultural policies which aim to protect or preserve cultural traditions and practices can therefore have the effect of making it more difficult for women in their attempts to challenge existing arrangements.

Contemporary feminist thought has largely been taken to sit well alongside theoretical approaches focussed on minorities, such as those broadly described as multicultural, because of their shared goal of exposing the ways in which a so-called "impartial" liberal universalism in fact conceals the particular voice of the dominant group – which is, from the feminist point of view, a *male* voice. However, in her renowned 1999 article 'Is Multiculturalism Bad For Women?', Susan Moller Okin poses the question of whether there is in fact a tension in this pairing of women and multiculturalism which is potentially damaging for women's rights.

Clearly the central tenet of feminism that women should be treated as equals sits uneasily alongside claims for special rights to protect groups that sustain such practices as unequal rights of ownership, marital status, political participation and educational opportunities. Put simply, the criticism is that group rights reflect the internal power relations within cultures, and since women are usually not the powerful in society, group rights are often bad for women. This is exacerbated by the particular role women usually play in the maintenance, preservation and continuation of cultural traditions. Gatens argues that '[i]t is not too strong to say that they literally *embody* these traditions' (Gatens 2004: 276). As Benhabib puts it,

> [w]omen and their bodies are the symbolic-cultural site upon which human societies inscript their moral order. In virtue of their capacity for sexual reproduction, women mediate between nature and culture, between the animal species to which we all belong and the symbolic order that makes us into cultural beings (Benhabib 2002: 84).

Gender and the divisions between gender roles are usually central to a culture's identity. According to Coomaraswamy, '[w]omen are exalted as the custodians of culture, the spiritual centre of the nation' (Coomaraswamy 1999: 81). Arati Rao writes that women are:

> the most visible and significant embodiments of culture in their appearance, demeanor, and language. They are the primary socializers of children in the customs of their community. They are the first to be targeted in violence against a group's particularity (Rao in Gatens 2004: 276).

Similarly, Yuval-Davis contends that women are central to the whole system of emblems through which the 'mythical unity' of ethnic 'imagined communities' is culturally contained and ideologically reproduced (Yuval-Davis 1997: 195). Women often symbolise national and collective 'honour'; until recently rape in warfare was not defined as a war crime or form of torture but as a 'crime against honour', the honour referred to being not that of the woman, but of her family and her collectivity. Similarly wars are declared and fought for the sake of the 'womenandchildren', in Cynthia Enloe's phrase (Yuval-Davis 1997: 196).

Okin notes that the 'sphere of personal, sexual, and reproductive life are a central focus of most cultures' and that religious or cultural groups are often particularly

concerned with "personal law" – the laws of marriage, divorce, child custody, division and control of family property, and inheritance. Since women put more time and energy 'into preserving and maintaining the personal, familial, and reproductive side of life', the defence of cultural practices will inevitably affect them more (Okin 1999: 12-13).

The centrality of women to culture has also meant that "modernization" and the globalization of markets and politics have had asymmetrical effects on women and men. In post-colonial and Third World societies, it is usually men who participate in the changes these bring to the public sphere of work and citizenship, while women are expected to preserve culture, religion and tradition in the home and family life (Gatens 2004: 276-7).[52] What parts of modernity are appropriated and which are rejected as "Westernization" is highly selective. Changes that affect women and the domestic realm are often far more contentious than changes with respect to men in the "outside world" (Narayan 1997: 28). Narayan argues that women are 'disproportionately assigned the tasks of "preserving national culture and traditions"' (Narayan 1997: 29).

Similarly, when reforming or traditionalising regimes seek to eradicate Western influences, it is women who are hardest hit. For example, in some Muslim societies, the non-Islamic traits are regarded as aberrations resulting from colonial intrusion, and need to be eradicated (Afkhami 1999: 69). Women often bear the brunt of this because, according to Afkhami, the Islamist world view 'is defined mostly by its treatment of women' (Afkhami 1999: 71). Mernissi explains this:

> The fact that Western colonizers took over the paternalistic defence of the Muslim woman's lot characterized any changes in her condition as concessions to the colonizer. Since the external aspects of women's liberation, for example, the neglect of the veil for western dress, were often emulations of Western women, women's liberation was readily identified as succumbing to foreign influences (Mernissi 1975: vii).

[52] We might note however that the exclusion of women from power within cultures takes many different forms. For example, in Australian Aboriginal communities, men have the most important role which is spiritual, whereas women's role of tending to matters economic is viewed as inferior.

From this discussion it is clear that cultural images of women are intimately entwined with dominant conceptions of cultural identity in a way that makes strong multiculturalism problematic. Cultures only appear as a "whole" from the external point of view, from within, a culture presents itself through shared but contested narrative accounts which form not a seamless whole, but 'a horizon that recedes each time one approaches it' (Benhabib 2002: 5). Minority rights policies that seek to protect against the kind of cultural erosion that does not threaten the majority, through measures such as group rights to protect traditional laws of marriage and divorce and to place restrictions on marriage partners, are likely to reinforce the subordination of women.[53]

Furthermore, 'liberal' defences of multiculturalism that stress autonomy do not necessarily fare any better. Okin argues that even liberal defenders of group rights such as Kymlicka, who place emphasis on the autonomy of individuals and do not defend group rights which seek to protect illiberal practices, can be problematic. Ensuring formal protections such as the ability to "question one's inherited social roles" and ruling out public discriminations which deny education or the right to vote and so on is insufficient, since culture-based gender construction and inequality usually occurs within the private sphere of the household (Okin 1998: 665, 1999: 21-2).

The unequal position of women within many cultures is often reinforced, firstly by the fact that this becomes embedded in an imaginary which presents it as being in the natural way of things, and secondly because of women's confinement to the "private"

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[53] Okin also notes how cultural or religious exemptions within states and from international documents are more likely to be upheld where the issue regards unequal practices concerning women, rather than on racial grounds, or even those of animal conservationism. She argues that when one looks at the cultural reasons for exemptions from international treaties one finds that such justifications stand notably more chance of being accepted when they concern the unequal treatment of women than when they deal with other issues. She writes that, for example,

> there are no such reservations by countries signing the earlier 1965 Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Also, culturally based claims for exemptions or exceptions from treaties or conventions about other issues such as whaling or cutting down the rainforests have considerably less chance of gaining international acceptance than when the exemption is based on unequal practices regarding women. In short, culture does not generally trump in cases like racial discrimination or whaling, but it does trump and is accepted as trumping when issues of women's equality are concerned (Okin 2006).

sphere. This leaves them often unable to 'participate in and influence the more public parts of the cultural life, where rules and regulations about both public and private life are made' (Okin 1999: 13). Inequality within the home does not only reflect a lack of gender equality, it also effectively operates as repression of core political rights, such as the right to opinion, freedom of expression, the right to assembly, to vote, and to associate with others (Howland 1999: 94). Women are effectively at a double disadvantage since they are excluded from the very areas of decision making through which they could exert some influence over their position.

Feminist thought has exposed the many ways in which the oppressed state of women is presented as the norm. MacKinnon and others have illustrated the ways in which the private *is* political. Carole Pateman suggests that Mary Wollstonecraft, in her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* of 1792, identifies two dimensions of the rights of man (Pateman 1995). The first dimension consists in the familiar civil and political rights, which Wollstonecraft demands should also be shared by women. However, Pateman asserts that Wollstonecraft also makes a second lesser-known argument which is that women's political exclusion is linked to the second dimension of the rights of man. Alongside their civil and political rights, men also enjoy what Pateman terms the "special" rights of men (Pateman 1995: 8-10). These special rights are private rights over women that maintain women's subordination to men: 'the rights men exercised in their capacity as husbands, in their control of education, and in their control of the means of economic independence and political power' (Pateman 1995: 10).[54] In *The Sexual Contract*, Pateman extends this type of argument to show how the tradition of the social contract has served to ensure men's power over women – an implicit contract among men to enforce patriarchy (Pateman 1988).

By excluding the personal from politics the voice of women has effectively been silenced. At a very real level, when women try to enter into the public sphere, they are

[54] Pateman argues that, whilst we might have come a long way in achieving equality in civil, legal and political rights, we still have even now a long way to go in eliminating men's special rights:

> the legacy of the second dimension of the rights of man is still very visible in social expectations, particularly in sexual relations, in the continuing male monopoly of authoritative positions in major institutions, and the structure of citizenship in the welfare state (Pateman 1995: 11).

entering into a world which is constructed by men, for men. For example, Benhabib notes how the public sphere was

> historically, socially and culturally a space for male bodies... not only in the sense that only men were active citizens, entitled to hold office and appear in public, but also in the sense that the institutional iconography... privileged the male mode of self-representation (Benhabib 1996: 81).

It is the thoughts and imagination of men that have shaped societies, in ways that often exclude women. What comes from the imagination of men becomes tied to notions of "nature" and "authenticity" in ways that normalise the oppression of women, and make that which is constructed appear as natural. Conceptions of what it is to be a good wife, a good mother and so on within different cultures work to silence the voice of women and encourage the acceptance – and perhaps non-recognition – of her oppression. Uma Narayan gives a personal example of this with an account of her mother's unhappiness at the hands of her mother-in-law and her father's refusal to intervene in domestic matters:

> I [...] remember my mother years later saying, "When I came to Bombay right after I was married, I was so innocent I did not know how to even begin to argue or protest when my mother-in-law harassed me," with a pride and satisfaction that were difficult for me to understand. That "innocence," that silence, indicated she was a good wife, a good daughter-in-law, well-brought up, a "good Indian woman," a matter of pride, even to her whose "innocence" had not prevented her from recognizing that what she was being subjected to was wrong, but which had prevented her from explicitly contesting it (Narayan 1997: 7).

Okin argues that women have themselves often been culturally conditioned to accept their position, that 'persons subjected to unjust conditions often adapt their preferences so as to conceal the injustice of their situation from themselves' (Okin 1999: 126). Older women in particular tend to be more conservative and are often co-opted into reinforcing gender inequality (Okin 1999: 24). It is not easy to question cultural constraints that have had a major impact on one's whole life; if one has had to adapt one's own preferences to fit into a social role this is not easily reversed. Okin contends that experience of such constraints may produce a psychological need to impose them in turn on the younger generation, backed up by the fact that in many cultures the main experience of power a woman ever gains is over her daughters and

daughters-in-law (Okin 1999: 126-7). The perpetrators of violence against women in certain cultural contexts are often themselves women and mothers, grandmothers and mothers-in-law are often more centrally involved in perpetuating cultural rituals that are violent to women than are the men in the family. Coomaraswamy observes that these women

> are outraged when feminists construct them as abusive parents. For them these cultural rituals are part of the socialization of women and rites of passage that will ensure that their daughters will marry well and be sexually restrained (Coomaraswamy 1999: 83).

This discussion has demonstrated that Okin raises a crucial point, which applies to women within culture but can be extended to include all vulnerable persons. Looking at examples of the oppression of women within cultures throws into stark relief what a commitment to sensitivity to culture might entail. Those who make arguments for group rights on liberal grounds need to acknowledge that the subordination of women is often informal and private and culturally reinforced (Okin 1999: 22). While the problems with conceiving as culturally conditioned all behaviour which looks oppressive through the liberal lens will be discussed in the following section, this rightly serves to highlight the muddy area that exists between "free choice" and coercion. Therefore, women's own endorsement of cultural traditions and practices is not necessarily to be taken at face value, the complex political motivations behind so-called "natural" and "authentic" women's roles and norms surrounding their behaviour must be interrogated. Conceptions of womanhood are usually chosen by men, and it is clear that the "traditional" role of women must not be exempted from standards of justice on the grounds of "difference" or "identity". Multicultural policies can serve to foster what Frances Raday terms "havens of injustice" (Raday 1999: 162).

By granting powers that effectively reinforce the public/private distinction, multicultural policies might not only reinforce the subordinated position of women within cultures, but also hinder them in their struggles for change. Since identities are being continually renegotiated (or since, in Rushdie's terms, we are all "migrants"), policies aimed at protecting traditions and which allow for a certain version of "authentic identity" to enforce itself, hinder women in their attempts to challenge

cultural norms. The demands of identity and claims of "tradition" cannot be taken at face value; as Nussbaum asserts, we must ask exactly who's traditions, what culture, which customs are being appealed to when "culture" is played as a trump card (Nussbaum 1999: 37).

> Women should recognize that where the voice of tradition speaks, that voice is most often male, and it has even invented a little squeaky voice for women to speak in, a voice that may be far from being their own true voice, whatever precise content we attach to that idea (Nussbaum 1999: 79).

To replace critical judgement with acceptance of the others' terms is to fail to seek out this voice. As Nussbaum suggests, there would seem to be something not a little condescending about treating Chinese or Indian or aboriginal women as bound by ancient traditions – especially when we ourselves would never tolerate a claim in our own society that women must embrace customs that arose thousands of years ago (Nussbaum 1999: 37).

2. Problems with Okin's abstract universalism

So far the focus has been on the shortfalls of a strong multicultural view in responding adequately to the complexities of the position of women within cultures. It is clear that feminists are right to raise the question of the compatibility of their goals with alignment to various forms of "identity politics" which endorse the protection or preservation of certain traditions: that policies of multiculturalism might indeed be 'bad for women'. Clearly the defence of culture needs to be handled with care.

However, this section argues that the language of liberal universalism also fails to meet the challenge of cultural complexity. The picture Okin draws of the tensions between universalism and multiculturalism renders them unnecessarily polarized. This obscures the grounds for the meeting of universal and cultural norms; i.e., the grounds for a situated universalism. Failing to interrogate the conflicting interpretations of norms and taking asserted cultural practices as definitive of cultures leads Okin to present cultures themselves as oppressive to women rather than contested traditions within them, thus painting a picture of cultures as static and obscuring the extent to which women within cultures are social actors in their own right. Furthermore, the abstract universal approach obscures also what might be

gained from a fusion of horizons. As Parekh writes, Okin 'fails to appreciate the full force of the challenge of multiculturalism and the opportunity it offers to liberals to deepen and enrich their self-understanding' (Parekh 1999: 73).

Okin is highly aware that cultures are not cohesive and homogeneous but multi-stranded and changing, and it is precisely because of this that women must not be trapped within traditions by policies such as group rights or cultural defence cases. She writes for example that there 'can be no justification for assuming that the groups' self-proclaimed leaders—invariably composed mainly of their older and their male members—represent the interests of all the groups' members' (Okin 1999: 24).

However, Okin's discussion of culture and cultural practices displays inconsistency with regards to the internal diversity of cultures. The language and terms with which she discusses cultural practices often paints them as if they are definitive of cultures in general. For example, Okin writes of the 'culturally based [custom]' in 'Pakistan and parts of the Arab Middle East' where a woman who brings rape charges is frequently charged herself with the serious Muslim offence of *zina* or sex outside of marriage (Okin 1999: 15-16). Okin notes that in these places, '*culture condones* the killing or pressuring into suicide of a raped woman by relatives intent on restoring the family's honor' (Okin 1999: 16, italics added). For Okin, the neglect of the tension between feminism and group rights is 'crippling' because

> so many of the world's cultures are highly patriarchal. That this is so is confirmed by the fact that "But this is our culture" is a response so often given by male elites around the world to justify the continued infringement of women's rights (Okin 1998: 665).

Little attention is paid to the contestation surrounding "cultural" practices, or the complex webs of belief in which they are embedded. Okin views them only as "oppressive" and neglects all internal meanings. For example, in her discussion of the practice of female genital surgeries, the examples she gives present it as being purely about reducing the woman's sexual pleasure and making her more marriageable (Okin 1999: 14-5). Yet there are many more reasons than this given by people within cultures that perform this practice. Trying to eradicate practices without engaging with these internal reasons is unlikely to achieve the desirable effect.

Failing to engage with internal norms neglects the traditions of contestation within cultures, including the strong internal feminist movements campaigning for a change at the level of law and cultural norms. It thus fails to see women as valuable contributors to the re-invention and recreation of social meanings and cultural identity (Gatens 2004: 277), in the terms of world travelling, as 'subjects, lively beings, resistors, constructors of [their own] visions' (Lugones 1989: 18). Defining cultures in terms of male patriarchal beliefs effectively reasserts their control over the narratives of culture and reinforces them. This makes the task of the indigenous feminist difficult since it effectively reaffirms the "culture" as being that which she is trying to change. Multiculturalism is presented as polarized to the interests of women, positing (other) "cultures" in opposition to enlightened reform and shifts the focus away from internal change and towards "opting out", therefore restricting the transformative space within cultures.

Here we see the asymmetry in Okin's treatment of cultures. While "other" cultures are defined by Okin by certain patriarchal practices, her own culture is judged by its highest ideals. She appeals to horrific examples within cultures when arguing that other cultures might need to be 'eradicated', while any abuse of women's rights in Western liberal cultures are judged to be an aberration because the 'norm of gender equality ... is at least formally endorsed by liberal states' (Okin 1999: 9) and 'women in more liberal cultures are ... legally guaranteed many of the same freedoms and opportunities as men' (Okin 1999: 16-7).[55]

This asymmetrical treatment is furthered by her focus on alien practices which are highly contested, rather than on the more common (and shared) social and economic problems that face women, in different forms. This all serves to cast difference as "otherness" and feeds into a perception of Other cultures as backward. In failing to contextualise practices, Okin reproduces the "colonialist stance" towards Other cultures discussed by Narayan (see chapter 3 above), that is, the drawing of implicit contrasts between the other culture existing "outside of history" which is irrational

[55] This is despite the fact that one-third of all reported crimes against women in Britain result from domestic violence and take place at home (Bhabha 1999: 80). This statistic is taken from *Human Rights and Wrongs*, an alternative report to the UN Human Rights Committee.

and unchanging, as against rationalist, enlightened liberal culture. It combines to form, in Bhabha's words, 'a dangerous presumption that many of the world's other cultures—cultures that are not "Western majority cultures"—exist in a time warp' (Bhabha 1999: 82). The fascination of liberal feminists with what I have previously referred to as "female genital surgeries" is a case in point here, taking the same role as *sati* in earlier feminist discussions. Carens notes for instance that contemporary discussions over immigration often focus on the 'problems' raised by the 'alien' values of immigrants, and that 'the issue of genital mutilation is frequently used to illustrate and define the nature of the presumed conflict of values', the effect of which is implicitly to 'create an identification of the West with civilization and of other cultures with barbarism, and to define immigrants as threats because they are bearers of a barbaric culture' (Carens 2000: 40-1). These identifications are possible because there is no focus on any internal opposition to these practices within the countries of origin, on the fact that immigrants may not embrace the dominant cultural traditions, and, importantly, little is said about the failures and inadequacies of Western liberal democratic states with respect to gender equality (Carens 2000: 41). Liberal feminists such as Okin need to look closely both at the processes by which traditions and practices come to be seen as defining of cultures, and at the contested interpretations surrounding such practices.

Okin's discussion of religion in terms of their 'founding myths' reinforces this static portrayal. She contends that the founding myths are usually tied up with very specific images of women, e.g. that they are weak and promiscuous and need to be controlled by men (Okin 1999: 13). Yet, as Nussbaum notes in her critique of Okin's article:

> By treating the original core of the religion as equivalent to certain patriarchal stories, Okin simply bypasses centuries of debate within each of the religions, debate highly pertinent to religion's role in the search for women's equality (Nussbaum 1999b: 107).

By judging in terms of her own liberal standards, Okin concludes that religions are oppressive. But as Parekh argues, where women themselves do not perceive themselves in the same way as liberal feminists, it would be wrong to conclude that

they are victims of a culturally generated false consciousness and in need of liberation by well-meaning outsiders:

> That is patronizing, even impertinent, and denies them the very equality we wish to extend to them. This is not to say that they might not be brainwashed, for sometimes they are, but rather that we should avoid the mistaken conclusion that those who do not share our beliefs about their well-being are all misguided victims of indoctrination (Parekh 1999: 73).

Insisting on regarding as *caused* what others take to be free actions is a failure to treat others with dignity in itself (Appiah 2005: 60). In discerning oppressive practices in other cultures we must allow for the specificity of difference and oppression, which is often obscured in universalist discourse. Standards of liberal autonomy hold an implicit conception of agency as that of the free and unencumbered chooser, which is particular and ill-placed for understanding the agency of women in different cultural or religious contexts. Western liberal feminists must be careful of characterising religion in general as bad for women. Whilst many religious practices might fail to extend equal treatment to women as men, to treat religion as inherently patriarchal undermines the stance of women within religions who both criticise aspects of their religion but who nonetheless see themselves as religious. This requires recognising in a real sense that other women have different views of what it means to lead a good life. We cannot presume that secular reason and morality exhaust the forms of valuable human flourishings (Mahmood 2001: 225).

An engagement with the terms through which women describe their own lives is crucial if we are to foster understanding and communication between those of different cultures or religions. This is not abstract, but is real and pressing, for instance, to grasp what is at issue in the current debate over veiling. Not engaging with the horizon of the other can foreclose possibilities for cross-cultural dialogue or fusion. Here we can turn again to the world travelling approach which seeks connection through "independence". Okin's universalist approach to complex practices denies difference and effectively presents the "other" as a lesser or defective form of the self. The world travelling approach suggests enough distance between oneself and the "other", that the "other" is recognized as engaged in and entitled to the same process of self-definition as oneself (Gunning 1991-2: 198 n42).

By accepting the justifications offered in cultural defence cases as representative of the fundamentals of the religion or culture, Okin effectively backs up the claims of men within cultures to be offering authentic interpretations. Rather than promote change, this reduces the arena of multiplicity and makes the task of the indigenous feminist more difficult by effectively reaffirming the "culture" as being that which she is trying to change. Amongst other things, this plays into the hands of fundamentalists. It reinforces the interpretation of challenges to dominant norms as external and Westernized, and so makes it easy for fundamentalists to reject the demands of internal feminists as "Westernized" and external to their culture. Third-world feminists are seen not as reformers within the culture, but dismissed as symptoms of "Westernization" (Narayan 1997: 6). It also reinforces the perception that the role of women is crucial to the preservation of culture.[56]

Okin concludes that in some cases cultures should be altered so as to become compatible with the equality of women, but in others, women might 'be much better off if the culture into which they were born [became] extinct' (Okin 1999: 22). Yet as Raz notes,

> [f]or most of us the thought of discarding or destroying our culture and starting with a clean slate just does not make sense...We do not reject our culture when we find it replete with oppression and the violation of rights; we try to reform it (Raz 1999: 97).

From the internal perspective, the option of leaving will normally fail to present itself as a real alternative.

In failing to engage with the complex dynamics of change and competing interpretations within cultures, abstract universal thinkers can miss the chance of focussing on the dynamic of change *within* cultures. When we are critical of our own

[56] Debate over the wearing of the veil provides an example of the role of external critique in solidifying traditions. Walley suggests that it was colonialist attitudes to the veil as being 'not simply the symbol, but the enactment par excellence, of Muslim cultural inferiority and degradation' that 'positioned women as the ahistorical embodiment of that "tradition"' (Walley 1997: 426). Thus, where it might not have been before, the link between women and "tradition" was made central by nationalists in colonised Muslim countries in their fight for independence, who simply inverted the colonialist equation and instead 'championed the veil as the embodiment of religious and national identity' (Walley 1997: 426).

cultures, it may often be characterised as a betrayal by those who claim to be its custodians. However criticism, and the desire for change, need not be perceived negatively, but may even be seen as an expression of love for one's culture. It entails the application of ideals, of what that culture may yet become in overcoming whatever injustices it currently exhibits. To want the best for one's culture, is not to reject it, but to embrace it, preserving that which is worthy of preservation, and changing that which stands against the face of humanity. The focus in universalist literature on culture must give more emphasis to cultures as dynamic and changing, and on identifying the principles that govern that change. Some of those principles will be common among cultures, such as the gradual acknowledgement of fundamental rights, and the condemnation of their violation.

Predicating that women are in a false state of consciousness out of which they need to be raised assumes a fixidity to "women's oppression" that has to be discovered and then changed (Yuval-Davis 1997: 202). This assumes that this fixed reality of women's oppression 'is shared by all women, who are perceived to constitute a basically homogeneous social grouping sharing the same interests'. Differences are held to be mainly reflections of different 'stages' of 'raised consciousness' (Yuval-Davis 1997: 203). Gatens argues that understanding justice for women in terms of overcoming those particular and contingent norms concerning women's sexuality within a culture that are blocking her from enjoying universal human rights, 'assumes the existence of an ahistorical, acultural, 'essential' individual, whose desires and 'nature', are distorted, or illegitimately constrained by her 'insertion' into a specific place and time' (Gatens 2004: 286). This effectively posits 'woman' as a 'universal' – whose freedom may be secured by replacing the distorting and oppressive local baggage with universally appropriate human rights (Gatens 2004: 286).

Okin is right that feminists have in some cases gone too far in the opposite direction and become *too* sensitised to the dangers of essentialising women.[57] It is important

[57] For example, writers such as Elizabeth Spelman and bell hooks argue that theories which work with the identity of 'women as such' rest on an unsustainable essentialism which ignores the impact of race, class and sexual orientation on the lives of women (Baumeister 2000: 21, Spelman 1988). Women of colour, working-class women and lesbians were among those who argued their experiences had been excluded by white, middle-class formulations of feminism. This led to a shift towards differences between women rather than an assumption of homogeneous interests (Walley 1997: 419). Okin argues that it is precisely because feminists have become *too* sensitised to this that they can neglect tensions

that feminist theory avoid 'the total fragmentation of its central categories' (Heyes 2000: 87). But Okin's 'internally undifferentiated and conflict-free concept of gender', that sees gender as largely constituted through women's shared domination by men, and women as 'defined by the similarities of their inequalities across race, class, and geography', allows her to interpret anything which doesn't conform to her notions of living a free life as oppressed (Flax 1995: 500).

The double requirement then, is that on the one hand, asserted "group identities" be viewed always from a position of caution, and that on the other, cultural differences are nevertheless understood to run very deep. Difference must be seen as real but not essentialised. Here we can again employ Wittgenstein's metaphor of family resemblance to conceptualise this similarity in difference in order to avoid essentialism in modelling the connections between women. Whilst there are many overlapping similarities running through, there is no one thing that can be said to be essential to womanhood. (This is true even of biological traits, for instance a male to female transsexual may not possess a vagina or a uterus but is still a woman (Heyes 2000: 84).

For Okin, recognition of the differences between us and thus the need for a multicultural approach comes at the expense of women's rights. She contends that 'stressing differences, especially cultural differences, [leads] to a slide toward relativism' (Okin 1994: 5).[58] However, this dichotomizing of cultural difference and universal concerns is unnecessary and unhelpful in bringing about effective change in attitudes and practices. Taking a contextual approach does not mean surrendering the critical edge crucial to feminism. The following section explores how the universal and the contextual need not be seen in tension with each other, how reason and tradition are not to be seen as antithetical, before returning in the final section to look

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between feminism and cultural rights: 'an excessive amount of deference to differences among women on the part of some feminist scholars, coupled with what sometimes becomes a hyperconcern to avoid cultural imperialism [...] leads, at worst, to a paralyzing degree of cultural relativism' (Okin 1998: 665).

[58] Her rejection of multiculturalism is due partly to a difference in focus – Okin specifically responds to multiculturalism as being mainly about group rights. However, group rights are only one aspect of multiculturalism. Many accounts which might be called "multicultural" indicate more the shape of an attitude which is focused toward the need for a contextual response rather than one which professes to be "impartial".

at how a contextual approach along the lines of the world travelling approach can help provide a way of balancing sensitivity to culture with universal rights.

3. Multiple meanings and the social imaginary

This section sets out to look in more detail at cultures as the sites of multiple strands and meanings. It is argued that if this multistrandedness is taken seriously, then there is no necessary tension between universalism and multiculturalism.

The discussion of Anglo-Indian literature in chapter 2 explored Rushdie's idea of migrancy as a metaphor for humans in general. This can be seen as representing the extreme end of the spectrum that is the common experience of us all. It represents not only divergences between cultures, but also within cultures. Individuals in many societies find themselves at the margins of or inbetween the different versions of culture on offer. Even living in one culture, we encounter different conceptions of it, different claims to what is authentic and valuable, not all of which are as adequate as others. At times this requires the complex repositioning of oneself in relation to what has previously provided one's 'fixed points'.

To invoke another metaphor of Wittgenstein's, the internal heterogeneity of cultures might be compared to an ancient city, which is made up of

> a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight, regular streets and uniform houses (Wittgenstein 1968: 56).

The city is constantly changing as new houses and streets, even whole suburbs are continually being added, adapted and demolished. There is no essential core – even the oldest, most scenic parts of the town can not be completely walled off from change. Yet at the same time, it can clearly be said to have an "identity". While changes are made, it doesn't all change at once – some parts remain the same. There is, then, a continuous identity in difference, but there is no essential essence that provides this identity. Again this allows us to use the concept of culture whilst avoiding falling into essentialist and static accounts of its character. Within cultural

traditions there are also critiques that are no less part of the history of that culture. The Suffragettes for example were not denying the British political tradition, they were applying standards immanent within it, arguing that the denial of the vote was not consistent with the responsibilities that women shouldered. Their protest against and critique of antiquated prohibitions was a continuation of the extension of liberties throughout society, one of the earliest acknowledgements of which may be said to be the acceptance of the customary emergence of rights that was codified in the Magna Carta. Norms which once held a powerful grasp on the collective imagination, such as the emotional unsuitability of women to bear democratic responsibility, are challenged and renegotiated *within* cultural traditions.

Since human beings are underdetermined, they must create a world of meanings which provide the context which gives structure to ways of being and acting (Gatens 2004: 294, n9). This world of meanings both shapes and is shaped by the individual. Illustrative of this is the dialogic narrative view expressed by Charles Taylor and Benhabib discussed in chapter 1. We are born into complex webs of interlocution or webs of narrative, from the narratives of the family and gender, to wider narratives of language and community. It is through learning how to be a conversation partner in these webs of interlocution that we become who we are. That human beings live in a world that is a world of meanings is explained by Benhabib. Almost all socially significant human action is identified as a certain *type of doing*. 'We identify *what* we do through an *account* of what we do' (Benhabib 2002: 6). We do not simply describe our doings but take an evaluative stance towards them, categorising them through binary pairs of "good" and "bad", "holy" and "profane", "pure" and "impure" (Benhabib 2002: 7). This is often at a subconscious level, for instance in the language we learn we also acquire an outlook on life: in learning to use words appropriately we absorb the social values of our culture. For example, this is seen in the terms 'dictatorship' and 'democracy' – children in Western countries learn very early on that the former is oppressive while the latter is so precious that it is worth fighting for (Belsey 2002: 3-4).

Benhabib's explanation is worth quoting at length:

> Although we do not choose the webs in whose nets we are initially caught or select those with whom we wish to converse, our agency consists in our capacity to weave out of those narratives and fragments of narratives a life story that makes sense for us, as unique individual selves. Certainly, the codes of established narratives in various cultures define our capacity to tell the story in very different ways; they limit our freedom to "vary the code". But just as it is always possible in a conversation to drop the last remark and let it crash on the floor in silence, or to carry on and keep the dialogue alive and going, or to become whimsical, ironic, and critical and turn the conversation on itself, so too do we always have options in telling a life story that makes sense to us (Benhabib 2002b: 146).

The options that are available to us are not ahistorical, but are culturally and historically specific, inflected by the master narrative of the family structure and gender roles into which the individual has been "thrown" (Benhabib 2002b: 146). But neither are we trapped by our context: 'vis-à-vis our own stories we are in the position of author and character at once' (Benhabib 1992: 214). Thus as humans we are not determined once and for all by our historical context; we are both situated and able to think beyond our immediate "boundaries". This is similar to Oakeshott's description of language in *On Human Conduct*. Language obviously constrains us, but only in the way that a musical instrument does. An instrument has a limited range of notes, but this does not restrict our ability to compose an infinite number of melodies.

Meaning is always 'excessive', ambiguous and open to re-interpretation and contestation (Gatens 2004: 287). Cultures and traditions are thus open to multiple and conflicting interpretations; in Ricoeur's terms they are subject to a "surplus of meaning" (Ricoeur 1976). One way of conceptualising this space of change is through the notion of the social imaginary. The concept of the imaginary is found in a wide variety of fields, such as anthropology, psychoanalysis, psychology, philosophy, social theory, literary criticism and feminist theory, and has been interpreted in a variety of different ways. In some accounts, it is seen as an individual, psychic phenomenon, whereas in others, it is viewed as a social phenomenon which plays a role in the construction of individuals as embodied and socially situated (James 2002: 175-6). Moira Gatens, following Castoriadis, gives an account of the second type, in which the social imaginary is understood in terms of the collective metaphors, narratives and images which play a part in constructing meaning, belonging and

identity for the members of a given community (Gatens 2004: 283, 286, James 2002: 176).

The social imaginary can be understood as embodying the collective expectations and evaluations about the range of appropriate behaviour for particular identities in particular contexts. It provides the institutions and social norms that constrain action and determine meaning, laying out different norms of behaviour for different classes, gender, caste and so on. It is at once constructed by the human imagination and sets (provisional) limits for it. It is the web of meanings constructed by the human imagination that constitutes a *second nature* (Gatens 2004: 286). It strongly shapes the meanings of womanhood and manhood, in ways that differ vastly from culture to culture. An example given by Gatens is that of the social meaning of an arranged marriage between a female minor and older man, which ranges from morally defensible behaviour that promotes community and family ties in one culture, to child sexual abuse in another (Gatens 2004: 283). Variations in meanings between social imaginaries occur across time as well as geographically, for instance it was not so long ago that Jerry Lee Lewis married his thirteen year old cousin, which was legal in the Southern States of America, but which led to a moral outcry when he toured Britain, and forced the tour's early cancellation.

Social imaginaries are always plural and include within them religious, political, economic, sexual, racial, ethnic, moral, national and international imaginaries, thus there will be contradictions within and between social imaginaries. They are 'sites of multiple, complex, even contradictory social meanings' (Gatens 2004: 288). The notion of the "social imaginary" is a way of conceptualising the space between tradition and "newness", in Rushdie's terms, how newness enters the world. Actors seek to challenge aspects of the dominant social imaginaries by drawing out these ambiguities and reinventing or reinterpreting norms.

The concern that is expressed by universalist feminists such as Okin is to the effect that the horizon of evaluative stances which we inherit has largely been shaped by men and thus reliance on internal norms to transform themselves has only accidental radical potential. The concern with multiculturalism is that it can effectively reinforce the meanings set by dominant men within cultures and make women's attempts to

change them more difficult. The argument of this chapter is that the complex discourse within cultures can be modelled to show how "culture" need not be held necessarily in tension with the "universal", but rather is the context in which universals are given concrete form. Therefore, a contextual or interpretive stance need not be taken as affirmative of the status quo.

Gatens argues that the space of the social imaginary can provide a fruitful 'middle ground' upon which negotiations may take place between human rights and cultural norms which contradict these rights (Gatens 2004: 277). 'Thin' universal norms must be adapted and reinterpreted for the given context. Universal norms such as human rights can only affect deep going change in particular cultural contexts if they resonate with at least some of the aspects of the social imaginaries. If a normative shift in relations between the sexes is to come about, ideas of universal rights will need to resonate with at least some aspects of the particular imaginaries from which the norms of male domination derive their legitimation. Hence it is not a clash between, but rather a dynamic, dialogical relation between, the abstract universal and the particular norms: 'an ongoing mutual exchange' that sees the meaning of both rights and norms 'as permanently open to negotiation and reconfiguration' (Gatens 2004: 288). When attention is paid to the changing and contested meanings within cultures, the ground is opened up on which women's rights can be defended within situated contexts rather than imposing abstract notions which fail to resonate with local norms and understandings.

Ricoeur argues that contextualism only need be in tension with universalism if one takes a pejorative notion of tradition in which modernity is interpreted 'almost exclusively in terms with breaking with a past thought to be frozen in traditions subservient to the principle of authority and so, by principle, out of the reach of public discussion' (Ricoeur 1992: 287). If cultural identity is instead presented in terms which emphasise its fluidity and changeability, yet nonetheless its continuity, there is no reason why a contextual multicultural position should be at odds with women's rights. In this sense, reformers can be seen as contributing to the preservation of the communal identity as much as conservatives (Tamir 1999: 51).

The fact that we are all rooted means that we need to be sensitive to the cultural lens through which we view actions. However, making justice reliant on the transformative counter-imaginaries within cultures is inadequate since it is not at all certain that these will be travelling in the direction we might want. Not all kinds of diversity are desirable and judgements still need to be made. Thus an emphasis on cultural identity crucially must not take the place of critical reasoning. That reason cannot take the view from nowhere does not mean we are left with a position of relativism. As is to be discussed in the following chapter, that we may have at hand no agreed universal foundations does not lessen our ability to argue for the universality of at least some core norms. The suggestion is that there is a core reasonableness that informs the limits of diversity, which can be seen as a thin universalism. Cultural sensitivity takes place against the backdrop of an already existing universal community in the form of the human rights culture, which in Mervyn Frost's terms may be constituted by what he calls settled norms (Frost 1996: 111), that is an acceptance that there are certain norms around which a consensus has coalesced, and which comprise the basis of a universal community, within which other particularistic communities co-exist, and co-habit. This implies an accommodation and modification between communities which is mutual and multicultural in form.

This section has highlighted that the cultural need not be seen as outside of, or antithetical to, this universal discourse. The multiple strands within cultures allow for the possibilities of cross-cultural dialogue. While dialogue alone does not validate universals, it creates the context in which some form of overlapping consensus, to use Rawls's term, can be reached.[59] Therefore it is argued that a situated ethics need not lack a critical edge. The final section turns to consider how a contextual dialogical approach that incorporates the concerns of hermeneutics and world travelling can provide a more adequate alternative to liberal universalism for the task of responding to cross-cultural issues, and can help mediate a path between judging through our own terms, and taking at face value the terms of the "Other".

[59] For discussion of John Rawls's idea of an "overlapping consensus" see his *Political Liberalism*, Lecture IV (Rawls 1993).

4. Criticism in context

Norms within social imaginaries are intimately connected to the surrounding meanings and narratives. Therefore, universal norms such as human rights can only affect deep going change in particular cultural contexts if they resonate with the internal norms and broader social meanings and narratives (Gatens 2004: 286). Abdullahi An-Na'im contends that:

> compliance with human rights standards cannot be achieved in a principled and sustainable manner except through the internal dynamics of the culture concerned. For that to happen, the argument for gender equality has to be made within the frame of reference of minority culture (An-Na'im 1999: 62).

Effective social criticism must be connected to (although not restricted to) the internal meanings of society. As Michael Walzer has noted, the external critic is seen as an enemy, and an enemy lacks standing as a social critic. Criticism from our enemies is both expected and simultaneously discounted. External criticism is ineffective and fails to command the passionate commitment needed to defend its enactment (Walzer 1987: 51-2, 59). Critique that engages with internal norms is often more effective in achieving the desired change in norms than universalist imposition of abstract standards. If we are to hope to understand a situation we must engage with the world within which it takes place and the meanings as they appear to those involved.

However, while the approach of Okin and fellow universalist feminists runs the danger of describing "other" women in their own terms and obscuring the other's agency, the goal is not to replace this with descriptions in the other women's terms, since for all the reasons discussed above, these terms might well be 'bad for women'. As noted in chapter 3, the role of the external critic can be crucial. The point is not that the agents' own accounts of their activities are incorrigible, for agents may be wrong. The concern is rather to avoid the kind of problems of ethnocentricity explored in section 2 above. An understanding of the specific context within which action takes place is a necessary precondition for any real understanding (Topper 2000: 519). As Taylor explains:

> The very nature of human action requires that we understand it, *at least initially*, in its own terms; that means that we understand the descriptions it bears for the agents. It is only because we have failed to do that that we can fall into the fatal error of assimilating foreign practices into our own familiar ones (Taylor 1985: 140).

The contextual approach to understanding does not then entail our simple acceptance of meanings as they are meanings for the other. Rather, by engaging with the horizon of the other, it opens up a third language, a new horizon, in which all parties can learn from the encounter. It is in this that we see the creative potential of difference. Ricoeur contends that we can use the creative energy that is generated by conflicting approaches to reach reconciliation (Ricoeur 1998: 73). Or to recall Audre Lorde's eloquent phrase, difference provides 'a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic' (Lorde 1984: 111).

This view seeks to open up a space for a new, shared discursive community in which we can forge shared terms. Bonnie Honig notes that:

> the promise of this approach depends in part upon the willingness of Western feminists to hold their own practices up to the same critical scrutiny they apply to Others, to hear the plural voices of women everywhere and to learn from them, while also refusing to prejudge the merits of practices that are unfamiliar or threatening to those of us raised in bourgeois liberal societies (Honig 1999: 40).

Failing to engage sufficiently with the context and effectively denying the horizon of the other can lead to distance rather than connection and can alienate others rather than foster conditions for effective cross-cultural discourse and "fusion". The language used by feminists such as Okin effectively holds power over "other" women, casting the discourse of the women themselves against the framework of "our own" standards of oppression. The Western feminist who fails to engage with the context of oppression here resembles the "arrogant perceiver" in the world travelling account who, rather than seeking to achieve understanding of the interests, priorities, and perspective of another as that other understands them, allows her own interests and priorities to determine how the other is perceived (Wright 2004: 69). The stance of judging the other implicitly seeks to gain control and presents the other as a lesser or defective form of the self. Understanding requires that we respect the separateness of the "other" and the reality of difference, while at the same time, avoiding too much

distance by recognising the similarities between us: '[w]e are different but not entirely dissimilar; we are independent beings but not without interconnectedness and overlaps' (Gunning 1991-2: 202).

One way of thinking of the fusing of horizons is in terms of an "imagined community" (Mohanty 2003: 46).[60] Chandra Mohanty suggests that such a community is "imagined", not in the sense that it is not "real", but because it suggests potential alliances and collaborations across existing borders; it is a "community" because it points, in spite of internal hierarchies, to the possibilities of what Benedict Anderson calls "horizontal comradeship". The alliance is based on political, not essentialist grounds of what is shared, and actors retain their divergent histories and social locations (Mohanty 2003: 46-7). This type of cross-cultural community is not however a cosmopolitan vision in which the shared community *transcends* our more local communities of identification.[61] It may be that the contemporary human rights culture can be understood to embody a 'thin universalism' of this kind, and it is this idea I want to pursue in the next chapter.

Conclusion

To conclude, I have argued against a "strong" identity position which might indeed run the risk of entrenching the unequal conditions of women within patriarchal cultural structures. Even were there a consensus existing on dominant cultural norms, this would not rule out the need for normative critique (although it might question the efficacy of intervening). However, I have contended that this does not mean that feminists must endorse a wholesale rejection of multiculturalism. A form of multiculturalism which makes a constructivist view of culture and identity central to its analysis can avoid reinforcing patriarchal hierarchies and imposing artificial

[60] The notion of imagined community is first used by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983).

[61] Hilary Charlesworth describes a similar method developed by some European feminists of "rooting" and "shifting". In this account, which has been termed "transversalism", each woman remains "rooted" in her own history and identity while "shifting" to understand the roots of other women in the dialogue (Charlesworth 2000: 75). The two conditions of this approach are firstly, that it should not mean losing one's own roots and values, and secondly, that it should not homogenize "other" women. It differs from universalism in 'allowing multiple points of departure rather than assuming that there is a universal bedrock of values in all societies' (Charlesworth 2000: 75).

constraints on cultural change. Viewing multiculturalism as inimical to the needs of women sets up a misconceived opposition between women's rights and culture. If cultures are viewed as sites of change and multiple interpretations, rather than in terms of unchanging and stagnant traditions, multiculturalism need not be a negative force for women. The struggles of women against certain aspects of their culture do not normally lead to a rejection of their culture, or the need that it be 'eradicated', but rather constitutes just as much an expression of that culture as more conservative interpretations.

If we make the dynamic and changeable character of cultures and identities our starting point, there need be no inherent tension between the local and the universal. When attention is paid to the space of contestation within cultures, or what Gatens calls the 'social imaginary', as presenting a real space for challenging existing norms, a culturally sensitive position is seen to be not only consistent with women's rights, but is arguably better placed to achieve their protection than a universalist, impartial view. If horizons are characterised by change as well as continuity, then a contextual approach need not be inconsistent with universal values. Through a fusion of horizons we can build discursive communities that cross borders – in which overlaps between the universal and the historical can be brought out and developed.

CHAPTER 7

The universal in the transitory: culture and human rights

Introduction

The argument of the preceding chapters has been that a contextual dialogical multiculturalism is able to respond to the situatedness of the subject whilst neither restricting the internal multiplicity of culture and identity nor surrendering the grounds on which to question the status quo. I have argued that this approach is able to respond both to the differences and the connectedness inherent in cultural diversity, and thus to mediate a path between cultural relativism and abstract universalism.

The aim of this chapter is to look more closely at the shape of a situated universalism, or the idea of the universal in the transitory, and to explore in more detail the transformative potential of a contextual, dialogical approach to cross-cultural understanding. It is argued that a contextual, culturally sensitised view is compatible with a certain kind of universalism that is not foundational but rather emerges from and is strengthened through cross-cultural dialogue. It is argued that human rights are an example of this dialogical consensus, which provides the focus for the chapter. The "human rights culture"[62] can be seen as a powerful example of the idea that universals can be developed through dialogue rather than justified solely through reference to arguments that only resonate within certain cultures. Human rights are a way of expressing, and fixing in international law, an overlapping consensus on certain norms, which must be seen as coming out of, rather than as in conflict with, contextual norms and traditions. In Gatens' terms, the human rights culture can be seen as an *international imaginary*, which will need to negotiate with particular social imaginaries.

The chapter is divided into six sections. The first section addresses some challenges to the claimed universal status of human rights, including the critique of so-called

[62] Rorty credits Eduardo Rabossi with this phrase (Rorty 1993: 115).

"Asian values". This throws up many important questions. The focus of the discussion is two-fold: firstly, it looks to question the notion of cultural boundaries that is involved in making these claims, but secondly, it notes the important point that is made concerning the *scope* of human rights. Concluding that at least some human rights have genuinely universal reach, the second section rejects the portrayal of human rights as an imposition of one culture on another. Instead it argues for a characterisation of human rights as articulating a shared international consensus on core norms, developing this by comparing the growth of the human rights culture with customary law.

The following three sections seek to characterise the idea of thin universalism that is immanent in this view of human rights through discussion of three important theorists. Section 3 addresses Richard Rorty's argument that the redundant search for foundations for human rights should be replaced by the manipulation of sentiments. It is argued in response that the use of reason is crucial to the spread of human rights, as is the recognition of particular identities. Section 4 addresses Michael Walzer's defence of thin or 'reiterative' universalism and rejection of 'covering law' universalism. It is argued that while Walzer importantly addresses our differences, he underestimates the role of interaction in the construction of universal consensus on values. Section 5 argues that Charles Taylor's position is more promising: that we may reach a consensus on something similar to human rights, a set of shared values which do not necessarily need to be expressed in the language of rights, but that may be sustained from within different cultural horizons, and may be given different priorities in a continual process of negotiation and renegotiation. Adherence to human rights will be more effectively achieved if they are framed in terms which find concrete resonance in the particular. The sixth section develops this by addressing arguments for a contextual mediation of rights, and looks at how human rights can incorporate the concerns of the world travelling approach.

1. Human rights: imposition or global consensus?

Tony Evans writes that it is now widely assumed that 'the age of human rights marks the triumph of reason over politics; as though, after two centuries of struggle, the truth of human rights is at last universally accepted' (Evans 1998: 3). Since the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the 'imaginative, rhetorical and ideological appeal' of human rights has grown steadily (Robinson 1998: 58). Ignatieff contends that 'there is now a single human rights culture in the world' (Ignatieff 1999: 318). This consensus finds its expression in a small set of crucial rights that are valued, at least in principle, by all governments in the contemporary world. These include prohibitions against slavery, genocide, murder, torture, prolonged arbitrary detention, and systematic racial discrimination. Bell contends that these rights have become part of customary international law, and are not contested in the public rhetoric of the international arena (Bell 1999: 851). This can be seen as constituting what Walzer calls "thin universalism", to be discussed below.

However, while human rights have been ratified by all governments in the world, there remains the suspicion that 'they are simply the fruit of the cultural history belonging to the West' (Ricoeur 1992: 289). There is still the perception that human rights are simply another form of Western imperialism, or part and parcel of globalisation: the 'embodiment and imposition of Western values on the other peoples of the world' (Gunning 1991-2: 192).

Human rights face criticism at many different levels. At the extreme, the notion of human rights is rejected in its entirety as being inappropriate to non-Western cultures. More often, however, what is contested are certain human rights, or the interpretations which are attached to these (Coomaraswamy 1999: 80). It is often those rights protecting women that come into conflict here. For example, internal control was safeguarded by many Islamic countries which signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, by making their agreement subject to the restriction that the interpretation must conform to the shari'ah (Coomaraswamy 1999: 80).

One of the biggest challenges to universal human rights comes from "Asian values". Many Asian leaders and commentators, particularly those who benefit from the current deferential hierarchies of some Asian societies, argue that human rights are Western and incompatible with the traditional values of Asian communities. Asian values tend to emphasise strong leadership, respect for authority, law, and order, and an emphasis on family and communitarian orientation which places the good of the

collective as above the rights of individuals (Jacobsen 2000: 2). This contrasts with their view of Western rights practice as prioritising a view of individuals as possessors of rights, which are elevated to the detriment of duties. The individualistic emphasis is seen to set up an opposition between the individual and society against which individuals are encouraged to demand their rights. It projects a conception of society that is typically associated with social contract theory in which society, or government, is charged with the business of protecting individuals' rights to the detriment of a more collectivist or constitutive conception of society that, in addition to rights, gives emphasis to responsibilities and duties to the community or its members. The rights mentality is seen as encouraging people to be self-regarding and weakening their sense of social solidarity and community, which in turn leads to a higher degree of social conflict and violence in general (Taylor 1999: 130). Asian commentators see Western societies, especially the United States, as degenerate and corrupt, suffering from social diseases such as crime, drugs and the disintegration of family and community ethics, the consequence of excessively legalistic and individualistic cultures (Yasuaki 1999: 107).

The perception of human rights as a Western imposition is reinforced by the positions of some western commentators who warn of the desirability and question the possibility of projecting western notions of human rights upon other cultures or civilizations. The most controversial of these is Samuel Huntington who argues that human rights, along with liberalism, democracy and political secularism, belong unashamedly to Western civilisation. The universalism of human rights is destined to fail and instead we will have a "clash of civilisations" (Huntington 1996: 70-2). The only way in which people from other civilisations can have full access to human rights is by adopting "Western" values, and hence implicitly by converting to Western civilisation (Bielefeldt 2000: 91).

Yet the notions of "civilisations" and cohesive categories of Western and Asian values at work in these accounts are highly problematic. These groups are neither internally cohesive nor wholly distinct from each other. Whilst we can identify generalized differences between "civilisations", there are also areas of huge overlap between them and sharp differences within them. They span vast areas in geographical terms, and contain diverse cultures, religions, histories, languages and

so on within them. They are not neatly bordered but are interconnected and overlapping in their ideas, histories, traditions, peoples and so on. As we have seen in the context of Anglo-Indian literature, many have a foot in more than one "world" simultaneously. Amartya Sen contends that the allegedly sharp contrast between Western and Asian traditions over values of freedom and tolerance 'is based on very poor history', and finds the authoritarian argument based on the special nature of Asian values to be particularly dubious. Libertarian ideas are to be found in non-Western histories as well (Sen 2005: 136, 284). The notion of a 'common Asianness' on which the Asian values debate is premised is to be challenged. From within Asian contexts there are also voices that vigorously emphasize the universality of human rights.[63] For example the Indian writer H. O. Agarwal states that:

> neither human rights can be different for eastern countries to western countries nor they can [*sic*] be different for developed countries and for the Third World countries. Human rights are colour blind and direction blind. They know neither right nor left, but only the human (Agarwal cited in Tomuschat 2003: 60).

From the opposite angle, many people within Western societies share the same kind of misgivings about rights that are found in non-Western states. Furthermore, the recognition of fundamental human rights does not rule out deep disagreement over what these might mean in practice. For example, Tomuschat notes that, in the "West", the common recognition of the dignity of the human being does not exclude deep-going divergences in one of the core areas of human rights, that of the protection of human life. There is no transatlantic consensus concerning the death penalty or abortion (Tomuschat 2003: 70-1).[64]

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[63] Parekh's point that the fact that some of the citizens of East Asian countries do not share these Asian values is 'immaterial' is problematic (see Parekh 2000: 137). He claims that this lack of consensus can be viewed in the same way as the status of equality within western societies: the fact that there are racists and sexists within western societies who do not share the value of equality does not make it any less central to our self-understanding. Whilst his point that, instead of focusing on whether these values are agreed on by all, the focus should be on what these values are and whether they offend against universal values is worthwhile, his communitarian-sounding argument does little for those within East Asian countries who want to claim their human rights.

[64] Bruun and Jacobsen argue that the 'crude dualism' between Asia and the West, is deliberately constructed by members of Asian elites for political reasons. The West is demonized in order to construct a positive image for Asia as morally superior, politically stable, committed to common cause and economically viable (Jacobsen 2000: 5). Furthermore, they suggest that Asian values are 'designed' as much for a Western audience as for internal consumption in an explicit criticism of Western universalist conceptions (Jacobsen 2000: 13).

The "Asian values" argument sees the notion of individuals as possessing rights which they ought to be allowed to exercise against the state as the product of a particular political environment. However, even if this is the case, this does not lessen its universal applicability. Likewise, as Sen points out,

> even if it had been the case that the values championed in Asia's past have been more authoritarian, this historical point would not be grounds enough to reject the importance of tolerance and liberties in contemporary Asia (Sen 2005: 136).

This is backed up in the view of Richard Goldstone, the prosecutor at the tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda:

> What victims want, what all victims want, is the same. Whether the victims are in China, Thailand, the United States, the Hague, or South Africa should make no difference at all (Goldstone 1997: 106).

Given the multiplicity within cultures and civilisations, we clearly need to interrogate exactly whose values are being invoked in assertions of "Asian values". "Cultural sensitivity" can end up leaving vulnerable those who are most desperately in need of human rights protection. Where leaders contend that human rights are not part of their culture, it is crucial to question the motives, and examine the justifications given for suspending the applicability of certain clauses or provisions within certain cultural contexts. Arguments pleading the special case of abrogation are often used by authoritarian leaders to legitimise their oppressive policies.[65] Thus giving in to the relativist arguments is playing to the interpretations of the traditionalists within the culture. It is crucial to identify who exactly is claiming to be the true bearers of cultural traditions and by what means they defend their right to interpret, or 'publish', common values for others to 'subscribe' to, and even more importantly, to identify who do not have the right to speak up in public and what alternative voices are heard underneath the official rhetoric in the countries in question (Bruun & Jacobsen 2000: 6).

[65] Kymlicka suggests that debates over human rights of this kind are often not over whether to subordinate local cultural traditions to transnational human rights standards, but are rather debates over who within the community should have the authority to determine the interpretation of the community's traditions and culture (Kymlicka 1998: 17-8, n. 24).

However, the challenge to the universalism of the language of human rights and the way in which they are inconsistently applied in practice is not to be easily discarded. Whilst we must reject the discourse of relativism and affirm the universal claim of at least some core norms, listening to these objections is crucial if human rights are to be made more inclusive. A distinction must be made between the question of to what extent special pleading on behalf of cultural elites might be an attempt to bolster oppressive regimes by sustaining and perpetuating practices that consolidate their power, and which cultural values have genuine claim to priority when faced with the universalism of human rights.

Often at issue is not so much the values embodied in human rights, but the perceived link to a comprehensive Western philosophy. Ricoeur contends that, while it is as though universalism and contextualism overlap imperfectly on a small number of fundamental values, such as those we read in the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, the legislation which guarantees the exercise of these rights 'is indeed the product of a singular history that is broadly that of Western democracies' (Ricoeur 1992: 289). Radhika Coomaraswamy contends that human rights as they are articulated in international documents and discourse can indeed be seen as the direct product of the Enlightenment, centred on the Enlightenment notion of man as unfettered and equal (Coomaraswamy 1999: 80).

As well as the West-centric language of human rights discourse, it is its ideological use and abuse by the West to back up its own political projects which is offensive from a non-Western perspective. James Marsh contends that we must 'own up to the contradiction in the West and North between universals affirmed and concrete economic, cultural, and political imperialism that violates these' (Marsh 2002: 231). Onuma Yasuaki similarly observes that, while conflicts over human rights are caused in part because of 'bad faith' on the part of non-Western authoritarian governments, conflicts are also caused by 'politically influential West-centric perspectives that tend to ignore or marginalize local perspectives' (Yasuaki 1999: 104).[66] One important factor here is that the human rights championed by the West tend to be civil and

[66] While "Eurocentrism" is generally used 'to designate a tendency to approach natural and social phenomena from a perspective that assumes the Western way of thinking as the standard framework', Yasuaki uses the term "West-centrism" to indicate that it is the American, not the European way that is decisively influential in today's world (Yasuaki 1999: 104, n. 2).

political liberties, especially in the United States. This tendency is also witnessed in the discourse of many major human rights NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (see Yasuaki 1999, 113-4). By equating human rights with civil and political rights rather than economic, social, and cultural rights, it allows the rich powerful North to avoid tackling issues which might seriously question their economically privileged position. Thus Chandra Muzaffer can write that, '[t]hough formal colonial rule has ended, Western domination and control continues to impact upon the human rights of the vast majority of the people of the non-Western world in ways which are more subtle and sophisticated but no less destructive and devastating' (Muzaffer cited in Dallmayr 2001: 65). Thus while maintaining that a genuine universal consensus does exist on human rights, and resisting the argument that these values are culturally specific, there is reason to question the scope of human rights. For example, Bell contends that a human rights regime is in place, but that it is 'thinner' than American-style civil and political liberties (Bell 1999: 851).

From a different angle, Will Kymlicka has argued that an unrestrained human rights universalism can have the opposite of its desired effect, and that instead of protecting individuals, it can undermine their cultural integrity in the application of principles of equality and fairness. In protecting the universal right of the freedom of movement, for example, migration may be facilitated to ancient tribal lands where the indigenous peoples are priced out of the market due to rising demand, leading to a diluting, or disintegration, of their communities (Kymlicka 1998). He has thus tried to make universal human rights compatible with the special rights of communities. Kymlicka is not rejecting human rights, but merely warning that their universalism can in certain circumstances be inimical to the protection of minorities.

Another challenge to the boundaries of human rights comes from feminist critiques, which do not question the universality of human rights *in theory*, but argue that as they are currently conceived they do not fully recognise the voice of women. Peterson and Parisi argue that human rights and international law are essentially gendered. They are not only ethnocentric, they are also *andro*centric (Peterson & Parisi 1998: 132). The central criticism is that human rights follow the public-private distinction, covering only issues such as torture and violence that are mostly "male" problems, and ignoring the kinds of violences routinely faced by women. The claim is

that the scope of human rights needs to be widened in order to meet the needs of women, and the particular abuses they suffer as women. These examples point to the conclusion that, while we might agree that human rights are universal, the scope of these is not fixed and final.

How then are we to characterise human rights in light of criticisms against them? One strategy is simply to assert their universal status. Defenders of western values see positive merit in projecting liberal values, and their concomitant human rights, to the global context as competing ideologies fail to sustain their legitimacy in the face of the success of western liberalism. For example, Francis Fukuyama famously argues that, with the collapse of communism and other non-liberal or totalitarian regimes, 'it makes sense for us once again to speak of a coherent and directional History of mankind that will eventually lead the greater part of humanity to liberal democracy' (Fukyama 1992: xii). As Chris Brown observes, this type of argument asserts simply that human rights constitute genuinely universal principles, and that we need not be embarrassed by the fact that these principles appear to favour some ways of life over others. Indeed it is right that this should be so; for example, while condemning racial discrimination de-legitimises some regimes, such regimes do not deserve to be treated as legitimate (Brown 2002: 41). A second argument takes the positivist view that as long as diverse nations sign and ratify human rights treaties, then they have willingly consented to be governed by their standards and cannot exempt themselves when it suits them (Gunning 1991-2: 240).

However, in the light of concerns of hermeneutic understanding and achieving something like a fusion of horizons, which is pressing not just from the perspective of human rights, but also from that of environmental concerns, these responses fail to convince. This chapter looks at how we might respond to these concerns of cultural sensitivity whilst still maintaining the compatibility of such a sensitivity with a commitment to universalism. My argument contends that a view of human rights can be achieved which resists the alternative view that human rights constitute an imposition on unreceptive alien cultures and instead casts them in terms of shared values which are developed and safeguarded through dialogue. From dialogue a consensus may be reached, understanding that as the horizons of different people and cultures meet and interact, they change and learn from each other (Gunning 1991-2:

240). Gunning suggests that the international arena can arguably be seen to represent a multicultural forum in which human rights norms are the result of a truly shared, multicultural dialogue (Gunning 1991-2: 231). The following section develops this view by drawing out the customary and non-final nature of human rights.

2. Human rights as international consensus and the role of customary law

The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights is not foundational but was born out of cross-cultural dialogue. The Universal Declaration, as Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the prime movers behind it, made clear, was not meant to be a treaty or international agreement, and placed no legal obligations on states. Instead it was a statement of aspirations, brokered among the member nations in the aftermath of the worst atrocities perpetrated by one group of human beings upon another. When Eleanor Roosevelt asked rhetorically where do human rights begin, and answered that they begin in our own back yards, she was shifting the ground for human rights away from the more traditional conceptions.[67] Neither God nor Man was being invoked as the measure. She implied that our respect for others, and our propensity to treat them civilly, begin with a common sympathy which arises in the first instance from common proximity and familiarity, but which eventually extends as we come to regard more and more people as being like ourselves, until eventually the whole of humanity is encompassed in one moral community with common fundamental rights within culturally diverse, but nevertheless compatible communities. This was not a revolutionary conception of how civilised norms develop, but was indeed an echo of something deeply embedded in the American political tradition. Alexis de Toqueville had long ago argued that we must recognise something of ourselves in others if we are to feel sympathy or empathy. The extension of human rights is brought about not through universal principles rooted in human nature or natural law, but rather through incorporating previously excluded peoples into who we think of as being like ourselves (Boucher 2000: 326-8).

[67] 'Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home... Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world' (Roosevelt in udhr.org).

Human rights are, in Mervyn Frost's terms, 'settled norms'. Whilst it is not agreed precisely what these rights are, nor how they ought to be protected, it is settled that human rights are a good and need to be protected by states and by the international system (Frost 1996: 111). Tomuschat contends that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights articulates rules that have crystallized as customary law, in particular the right to life, the prohibition of torture, which is the reverse side of a right to physical integrity, and the prohibition of discrimination on racial grounds.[68] Even where massive abuses take place, this does not militate against assuming a customary rule as long as the responsible author state seeks to hide and conceal its objectionable conduct instead of justifying it by invoking legal reasons (Tomuschat 2003: 34-5). While gross abuses of human rights occur 'off the record', and human rights groups such as Amnesty International work to expose the gap between public allegiance to rights and the reality of their on-going violation, this is largely practical work (Bell 1999: 851). The fact that governments try to hide violations from the eyes of the international community is testimony to the fact that they are acting as a moral constraint even if a weak one.

When we ask ourselves what it means to have a human right, as for example, Rex Martin does in his *A System of Rights* (Martin 1997), we would not expect to find consensus at a philosophical level, and indeed, it is unnecessary to do so. To possess a human right in the contemporary context, or to have it systematically violated, only makes sense within the ever expanding and intricately related legal framework, that, for example, in relation to humanitarian rights are universally accepted as customary international law, and were codified as such in the contexts of the ad hoc tribunals for the former Yugoslavia, and Rwanda, and have gained almost unanimous recognition despite the opposition of the United States, in the establishment of the International Criminal Court. Because the UN is not a law making body, the architects of the International Criminal Court wanted to appeal to a body of law that came about not by legislative enactment, where no legislator exists, but through the steady, gradual,

[68] Tomuschat notes that while the ban on torture, for example, is included in the category of core rights that are classified as *jus cogens* – as rules from which no derogation is permitted – the right to life is not included since life may lawfully be taken under certain circumstances, such as carrying out the death sentence or during armed conflict. Only specific forms of taking life are included in the scope of *jus cogens*, such as genocide (Tomuschat 2003: 35). This points to the fact that, even those rights we regard as fundamental in the abstract, can be subject to contextual application.

and continuous interaction among states, giving rise to norms that have achieved the status of customary international law.

The human rights culture can therefore be understood as primarily legal and as such does not assume nor require philosophical foundations, but is rather based on internationally agreed, both tacit and explicit, values and standards. These are not seen as absolute. For instance, while the Vienna declaration and Programme of Action states that '[a]ll human rights are universal [and] indivisible', the final declaration of the Vienna Conference of 1993 qualifies the universality of human rights with the statement that 'the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind' (Baehr 1999: 10).

Many international agreements are ambiguous in practice, thus human rights have a strong tendency towards being worked out in practice rather than according to ideals. The consensus on humanitarian intervention provides an example of this. While most states would agree that the Security Council is justified in authorizing military action in response to severe atrocities and other humanitarian emergencies that it sees as constituting a threat to peace and security, intervention without the agreement of the Security Council is more ambiguous. In cases such as Kosovo it becomes more tricky where human rights imperatives were pitted against the UN Charter's rules governing use of force (Stromseth 2003: 241). Jane Stromseth argues that the uncertain legality of humanitarian intervention without Security Council authorization is beneficial. This ambiguity not only places a very high burden of justification on those who would intervene without UN authorization, it also allows for the gradual emergence of normative consensus over time, based on practice and case-by-case decision making (Stromseth 2003: 233). She contends that:

> when the non-intervention norm and the developing norm to protect victims of atrocities pull in different directions...the resulting tension is best resolved in practice rather than in a doctrinal formulation abstractly in advance (Stromseth 2003: 271).

It is the gradual emergence of normative consensus over time that best characterises human rights, rather than their imposition of one culture on another. International law

can be seen as articulating what is already immanent in the international community. It is useful to compare this with Michael Oakeshott's view of natural rights. For him they are not the result of rational thinking but are rather abridged from what is already there, in the way that political ideology comes only after political practice, and in the same manner that a cookery book cannot exist in advance of knowing how to cook (Oakeshott 1981: 119-20). The Declaration of the Rights of Man is seen as a system of rights and duties which are not the product of reflection in advance of political activity.

> For here, in fact, are disclosed, abstracted and abridged, the common law rights of Englishmen, the gift not of independent premeditation or divine munificence, but of centuries of the day-to-day attending to the arrangements of an historic society (Oakeshott 1981: 120).

Thus, for example, the Magna Carta is 'a *record of specific liberties* already enjoyed, *not* a *statement of claims requiring authorization by a supreme power*'. The liberties it espouses should be seen not as the expression of an abstract idea but as articulating an idea of freedom already in some respects enjoyed, if by only a few in the form of privileges and exemptions (Oakeshott 2004: 239-40).

Although there are still traces of natural law and natural rights in the modern human rights culture, it does not predominantly assume that human rights are absolute, imprescriptible and inalienable, existing out there to be discovered by the exercise of rational or right reason (Boucher, forthcoming: 15). Human rights are properly understood not as the product of specific "Western" philosophies, but as articulating a convergence found in customary international law upon certain values. As such, human rights are not fixed and final, but open-ended. Thus the human rights culture can be seen to embody a universalism which is not foundational, to be discovered through the exercise of right reason, but rather emanates from, and is strengthened through, dialogical interaction; its universalism is not seen as a *fait accompli*, rather, its universal status is to be widened through ongoing 'interactive dialogue potentially enlisting participants around the globe' (Dallmayr 2001: 65). This suggests that the opposition between "foundational" universalism and "antifoundationalism" or relativism can be overcome. The following three sections set out to explore a way

between these poles through a discussion of the notions of universalism found in the writings of Rorty, Walzer and Taylor.

3. Rorty's liberal ironism

Richard Rorty argues that there are no universal foundations that we can appeal to as justification for human rights. However, this makes their universal claim no less defensible. Indeed, giving up the search for universal foundations is liberating because rationalistic principles do not drive action – instead we can channel our efforts into the serious business of promoting human rights through developing solidarity. For Rorty there is

> no *neutral*, noncircular way to defend the liberal's claim that cruelty is the worst thing we do ... We cannot look back behind the processes of socialization which convinced us twentieth-century liberals of the validity of this claim and appeal to something which is more "real" or less ephemeral than the historical contingencies which brought those processes into existence. *We* have to start from where *we* are (Rorty 1989: 197-8).

Truth is a property of language which is a human creation, therefore truth cannot be "out there", existing independently of the human mind (Rorty 1989: 5). In Rorty's view, truth is a property of sentences, which are dependent for their existence upon vocabularies. Therefore since vocabularies are made by human beings, so are truths. There is nothing outside of the language game we take part in to which we might appeal to adjudicate between alternative metaphors, we can only compare languages or metaphors with one another, not with something beyond language called "fact" (Rorty 1989: 20-1).

However, the fundamental premise of Rorty's theory is that 'a belief can still regulate action, can still be thought worth dying for, among people who are quite aware that this belief is caused by nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstance' (Rorty 1989: 189).[69] Human rights foundationalism is 'out-moded'. Instead of foundations,

[69] Rorty contends that in the ideal liberal society, intellectuals would be ironists who would accept the contingency of their position. He describes the figure of the "liberal ironist", borrowing Judith Shklar's definition of a liberal as someone who thinks that cruelty is the worst thing we can do. An "ironist" is someone who fulfils three conditions. Firstly, she has radical and continuing doubts about the final

human rights must be based on historical facts, accepted as a welcome fact of the post-Holocaust world (Rorty 1993: 115).

The expansion of the human rights community is to be gained through the spread of solidarity. For Rorty, as for Tocqueville, we must recognise something of ourselves in others if we are to feel sympathy or empathy. The spread of the human rights culture lies in coming to see strange people as being "like us", regarding more and more people as being like ourselves. Rorty cites Annette Baier, who follows Hume, in seeing sympathy as the fundamental moral capacity. Extending adherence to human rights is not a matter of our becoming more aware of the requirements of moral law, but rather of what Baier calls "a progress of sentiments" (Rorty 1993: 129). We should spend less time worrying about rational principles, and more time trying to manipulate sentiments. The question of whether others share the same 'final vocabulary' to us must be distinguished from the question of whether that other is in pain (Rorty 1989: 198). For Rorty, solidarity is not discovered by reflection, but created (Rorty 1989: xvi). One important intellectual advance made in our century is the willingness to replace the question of "What is our nature?" with that of "What can we make of ourselves?"

> We have come to see that the only lesson of either history or anthropology is our extraordinary malleability. We are coming to think of ourselves as the flexible, protean, self-shaping, animal rather than as the rational animal or the cruel animal (Rorty 1993: 115).

The human rights culture can be seen as one of the shapes we have recently assumed (Rorty 1993: 115).

Rorty challenges the idea that we all have human rights by virtue of the fact that "we are all human"; that what is most important is what we have in common with each other (Rorty 1989: xiii). Talk of such a thing as our "essential humanity" coheres with the sense in which we speak of the audiences at the Coliseum or the guards at

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vocabulary she currently uses, since she has been impressed by other vocabularies she has come into contact with. Secondly, she realises that no argument phrased within her own vocabulary can dissolve these doubts. Thirdly, she sees her own vocabulary as no more close to reality than any others (Rorty 1989: 73).

Auschwitz as "inhuman", lacking some component which is essential to being a fully-fledged human being (Rorty 1989: 189). He denies that "one of us human beings" (as opposed to animals, vegetables, and machines) can have the same sort of force as "one of us", where this means something smaller and more local than the human race. This notion of "one of us" is that which is being invoked when we speak of "our sort of people" (as opposed to tradesmen and servants) or a "fellow Catholic" (as opposed to a Protestant, a Jew, or an atheist). Rorty claims that the force of the "us" in these utterances typically contrasts with a "they" which is also made up of human beings – the wrong sort of human beings (Rorty 1989: 190-1). For instance, he argues that when individuals who harboured their Jewish neighbours during the Holocaust explain their actions they do not appeal to an abstract principle such as a universal human nature, but rather to more local reasons such as they were neighbours (although this is not quite true as many did appeal to a common humanity). The category of human beings has been used to exclude others not seen as fully human, and thus to excuse their "inhumane" treatment.[70]

Solidarity should thus be seen as a matter of 'imaginative identification with the details of others' lives, rather than a recognition of something antecedently shared' (Rorty 1989: 190). The process of coming to see other human beings as "one of us" requires detailed description of what unfamiliar people are like, but also redescription of what we ourselves are like (Rorty 1989: xvi). Solidarity is to be achieved through the power of the imagination. In terms reminiscent of Rushdie, Rorty contends that people are capable of offering redescriptions in liberating ways; 'human beings have 'the power of redescribing, the power of language to make new and different things possible and important' (Rorty 1989: 39). This is not a case of coming up with descriptions which most closely approximate a "true" reality, but rather is a question of which descriptions of the world and of ourselves are less useful and which are more useful (Rorty 1999: 27). This is a task not for rational argument, but rather through appeals to our emotions: to activate our sentiments of pity, compassion and revulsion. For Rorty it is 'more efficient' to put foundationalism behind us since it

[70] Rorty contends that there are three main ways in which "human" has been used as a category of exclusion. Firstly, classing people as animals, secondly, the man-child distinction, e.g. calling black males "boy", and thirdly, using "man" as a synonym for "human being". Rorty claims that in Catherine MacKinnon's view, 'for most men, being a woman does not count as a way of being human' (Rorty 1993: 114).

allows us to concentrate our energies on manipulating sentiments. Sentimental education is aimed at sufficiently acquainting

> people of different kinds with one another so that they are less tempted to think of those different from themselves as only quasi-human. The goal of this manipulation of sentiment is to expand the reference of the terms "our kind of people" and "people like us" (Rorty 1993: 122-3).

For him this is best achieved through novels, docudramas, and sad and sentimental stories. He writes that:

> detailed descriptions of particular varieties of pain and humiliation (in, for example, novels or ethnographies), rather than philosophical or religious treatises, were the modern intellectual's principal contributions to moral progress (Rorty 1989: 192).

Rorty's position on human rights is self-consciously ethnocentrist. The task is to convince people with different cultural identities 'to join our Eurocentric human rights culture' (Rorty 1993: 126). For Rorty, we should not feel we have to apologise for being committed to liberal bourgeois values, the extension of which would be a good thing for liberals and for the world (Boucher 2000: 342). For Rorty there is no call to dress these up as being consistent with diverse cultural backgrounds. He is dismissive of the multicultural emphasis on identity because of the way identities are bound up with a sense of who one is *not* rather than a focus on becoming more inclusive (Rorty 1993: 126). A strong commitment to identity is viewed as incompatible with a progress of sentiments which 'consists in an increasing ability to see the similarities between ourselves and people very unlike us as outweighing the differences' (Rorty 1993: 129). He wants instead to encourage a 'fruitful contamination' between cultures (Rorty 1998: 200n. 25).

However, does recognising what is shared entail that we overcome that which is different? The insights of hermeneutics and the world travelling approach suggest the importance of recognising difference as well as acknowledging sameness. If we don't engage with the others' difference, we fail to gain the necessary understanding through which our resemblances might be brought to the fore and fused within a new shared horizon. My argument throughout has been for a complex understanding of

both our differences and our connectedness. The previous chapters have argued that, if identities are taken on non-essentialist terms, taking account of difference does not mean seeking to artificially hinder 'fruitful contamination' between cultures, but is rather necessary to the fostering of strong cross-cultural dialogue.

Whilst Rorty is right that the spread of human rights requires greater solidarity, this is not to be seen through sidelining or eliminating difference, but rather through greater cross-cultural understanding of each others' differences. In this context, Rorty's ethnocentrism is alienating. It is not clear why human rights must be termed exclusively in the language of liberalism, which suggests putting up barriers rather than taking them down. Given the genuine concerns of "non-Western" societies highlighted above, including the self-interested ways in which the West utilizes human rights, Rorty's approach is unlikely to bring them on board. The liberating potential of divorcing the human rights culture from the need for philosophical foundations is that it allows for the focus to be on spreading solidarity, but why not use all resources which are to hand – a powerful fund of which is to be found in the local and particular mediation of human rights in cultural terms (to be discussed below). For Rorty there is no sense in which we might have something to learn from the other. As Dallmayr observes, in celebrating "our human rights culture", Rorty is willing to affirm its "superiority" and its ability to be exported, but without any readiness to face "otherness" or the risk of a possibly transforming and disorientating learning experience (Dallmayr 2001: 57).

Rorty's move from the lack of any universal philosophical foundations, to the substitution of reason by emotion, is premature. It is not necessary to invoke philosophical foundations in order to make rational arguments for human rights. That (as Gadamer argues) reason is always historically situated, does not make it less powerful. Sentimental education should not be seen as in tension with reason, rather, as Sen argues, '[r]eason...has an especially important role to play in the cultivation of moral imagination' (Sen 2005: 293). The fact that, as Rorty argues, human rights *can* be exported, suggests that people are not trapped within incommensurable language games. The kind of universality that is suggested, for instance, by the example of India discussed previously, is not based on transcendental facts about humanity, rather its spread can be seen as a practical task, requiring further cross-cultural interaction

and understanding. In the process of dialogue and interaction across cultures, a shared platform may be opened up, in which mutual learning can take place, and beliefs may be made more reflective.

Rorty's ethnocentric defence of human rights and lack of cultural sensitivity is both alienating and unnecessary. The following sections turn to a discussion of Walzer and Taylor, who, in contrast to Rorty, recognise the importance of both difference and connection in cross-cultural interactions. They invoke the language of universalism, but this remains "thin", in that any consensus on universal values is understood as sustained by the thick cultural contexts in which people are embedded.

4. Walzer's reiterative universalism

Despite the fact that Michael Walzer can be seen as the exemplar of communitarianism, with his argument that moral meanings are relative to communities and distinct 'spheres of justice', even he can conceive of the emergence of a thin universalism that ensures that there is not a radical incommensurability between cultures. Morality thus has a dual character for Walzer; it is 'thick' in that it is culturally resonant, a product of historical circumstances, and therefore varies from culture to culture, and in different historical periods, yet also 'thin', in that it includes a set of core principles which claim to have universal meaning. In *Thick and Thin*, Walzer differentiates between these two different voices of morality, which together characterise his view of "thin universalism". There is both:

> a way of talking among ourselves, here at home, about the thickness of our own history and culture...and a way of talking to people abroad, across different cultures, about the thinner life we have in common (Walzer 1994: xi).

He describes a 'universal moment' which takes place for instance when we march vicariously in other people's parades. Walzer recalls a television clip of a demonstration in Prague in 1989, in which the marchers carried signs saying "Truth" and "Justice". When we see signs like these, we know immediately what they mean, and understand the values that are being fought for. We feel solidarity with the marchers because we share a thin understanding of moral terms. However, although

we identify with the meaning of the signs, we actually understand very little. At most, what is recognised is a partial commonality, and not the full moral significance of the other cultures. This easy friendliness and agreement has as much to do with what the marchers did not mean as with what they did mean (Walzer 1994: 1, 17). The moral minimum is necessarily thin, in that it lacks the complexity and depth which characterise our thick, parochial moralities. This does not however detract from the importance of what we do share:

> "minimalism" does not describe a morality that is substantively minor or emotionally shallow...The minimal demands that we make on each other are, when denied, repeated with passionate insistence. In moral discourse, thinness and intensity go together, whereas with thickness comes qualification, compromise, complexity and disagreement (Walzer 1994: 8).

Thus Walzer's account of "thin universalism" remains focussed on difference, as well as on what, on occasion and very thinly, we might share. It is not possible to derive a thick moral culture from this moral minimum – it provides only the framework, the details of which must be filled out and will receive different elaboration within different societies. Morality is thick from the beginning, culturally integrated, and reveals itself thinly only on special occasions, when moral language is turned to specific purposes (Walzer 1994: 4). For Walzer, the thin moral ideals more or less accidentally and contingently coincide. They are found 'reiterated in different times and places', and 'seen to be similar even though they are expressed in different idioms and reflect different histories and different versions of the world' (Walzer 1994: 17). His view is not therefore that we can invent or construct a universal morality, rather, it is found contingently reiterated amongst states. The moral minimum is liberated from its maximalist context only for the concrete universal moment, as soon as we begin to look deeper into particular issues, we inevitably resort back to our maximalist language. For Walzer it cannot provide neutral ground from which to construct a more developed account of what morality requires.

For Walzer, this minimum universalism has given rise to an international society based on norms which have been commonly acknowledged by leaders of states. This he sees as a form of reiterative universalism, which is contrasted with covering law universalism. In his Tanner lecture entitled 'Nation and Universe', he explains these:

> Covering-law universalism describes the standard philosophical effort to bring all human activities, all social arrangements, all political practices, under a single set of principles or a single conception of the right or the good. The idea of reiteration, by contrast, reflects an understanding that morality is made again and again; hence there cannot be a single stable covering law (Walzer 1990: 532-3).

Individuals from different cultural contexts are not wholly different to each other but rather recognize themselves in each other to some extent, hence the minimalist universalism of reiteration. Walzer describes this through an analogy of a hundred architects from different times and places who are engaged in designing the same sort of building, maybe a home, a temple or a school. The buildings they design will be different given their different circumstances and conceptions; their understanding of places will differ, as will their conceptions of living, praying and studying. However, 'since they are all designing buildings for human beings, there will be certain features common to all the buildings' and that will thus be found reiterated through all the designs (Walzer 1990: 533).

Walzer eschews the search for foundations, to navigate the 'substructure of the ethical world', and instead starts from where we are in the real world, 'living in the superstructure' (Walzer 1992: xxix). In the preface to the first edition of *Just and Unjust Wars*, he writes that the building in which we live is 'large, its construction elaborate and confusing. But here I can offer some guidance: a tour of the rooms, so to speak, a discussion of architectural principles' (Walzer 1992: xxix). His practical morality doesn't mean he is left only able to describe the judgments and justifications of others, his interpretive account is also able to analyze moral claims, expose hypocrisies, reveal deeper commitments and so on. Indeed, this reflects the form that moral criticism usually takes:

> We are rarely called upon to invent new ethical principles; if we did that, our criticism would not be comprehensible to the people whose behaviour we wanted to condemn. Rather, we hold such people to their own principles, though we may draw these out and arrange them in ways they had not thought of before (Walzer 1992: xxix).

This can be seen as the idea of teasing out the inconsistencies in the social imaginary discussed in the previous chapter.

For Walzer, the expansion of an international moral community stems from the norms that are reiterated throughout states, adhered to by their citizens and leaders. Interaction can lead to transformations, but on the whole, moral transformations occur slowly. Walzer contends that, insofar as we can recognize moral progress, it has less to do with the discovery or invention of new principles than with, echoing Rorty, the inclusion under the old principles of previously excluded men and women (Walzer 1987: 27). The doctrine of human rights is seen as the product of a particular view of the moral world, that is, the liberal view of the rights of individuals, which Walzer sees also as the best view (Walzer 1992: xxx). He insists that the justification for any consensus we find on human rights is found from within the various thick moral worlds which we inhabit. By contrast, he sees covering law universalism as justifying the repression of difference, encouraging assimilation and integration within and across states, and as looking to erase boundaries:

> These ends can be described in more evocative terms: global democracy, international communism, world government, the rule of the messiah. I mean to disparage all of these...because they would require us to disregard or repress processes of cultural creativity and patterns of mutual attachment (Walzer 1990: 555-6).

However, Walzer's characterisation of covering law universalism can be seen as something of a caricature. We can defend a thin universalism that is not simply contingent without seeking to eliminate difference. The suggestion here is that, through interaction and inter-cultural dialogue, we can attain something like a fusion of horizons which does not seek to transcend difference. Whilst change through interaction does take place for Walzer, in his understanding we always return to the thick cultures in which we are embedded. This fails however to take sufficient account of how the position from which we speak is itself shifted. Architects copy or are inspired by designs elsewhere and from an earlier time, improving on existing designs and setting new standards of architecture. In forging a consensus on universal values, we do not simply meet and then go back to our maximalist moralities. Kant's

simple point in Perpetual Peace, that is, that nations emulate each other, would militate against this contingent view of universal or thin morality. Self-conscious emulation is just as much an endorsement of universal principles as accidental coincidence.

Through interaction we create a shared viewpoint, just as Gadamer contends that, when we speak a common language, we 'are continually shaping a common perspective... and so are active participants in the communality of our experience of the world' (Gadamer 1981: 110). The individual perspectives with which participants entered into discussion are transformed, and so they are transformed themselves. The human rights culture can be thought of as a language which has evolved out of our common conversations. As such it has created a new language, the terms of which states feel compelled to use, even if they do not adhere to them in practice. In reaching a dialogical consensus over human rights, and in backing this up through law, we have something which is stable and to some extent stands on its own – despite the fact that justification for it is not tied to one comprehensive doctrine.

Walzer is right that all interpretation must take place from within a particular context. We can accept that we always speak from within a particular embedded context, however this context is itself not static but shifts, creating a new shared context. The argument of this chapter is that, through dialogue we do not just contingently overlap, but rather develop a shared horizon of shared norms. Thus universal values are not simply reiterative, and it is possible to construct something that resembles a single stable 'covering law', although not as characterised in Walzer's terms. Here, the intention is not to 'bring all human activities, all social arrangements, all political practices, under a single set of principles or a single conception of the right or the good', as Walzer contends. It is rather to achieve a complex dialogue in which both our differences and our interconnectedness are allowed to come to the fore.

5. Taylor's unforced consensus

It is a project of this sort that animates Charles Taylor's argument. Human rights are presented not as an imposition nor as a contingent overlap, but rather in terms of a

consensus reached on norms of conduct which is sustained from within different cultural traditions. Human rights do not provide a comprehensive life view but can be adhered to from different comprehensive viewpoints.

In his essay, 'Conditions of an Unforced Consensus on Human Rights', Taylor looks at what it would mean to come to a genuine, unforced international consensus on human rights (Taylor 1999: 124-144). He envisions this as something like a Rawlsian "overlapping consensus" in which different groups, countries, religious communities and civilizations would come to an agreement on certain norms that ought to govern human behaviour, despite holding incompatible views on questions of theology, metaphysics, human nature and so on (Taylor 1999: 124). Yet not all differences can be reconciled. Unlike Rorty, Taylor sees that a convergence on human rights norms will not come about through a loss or denial of traditions all around, but rather by 'creative reimmersions of different groups, each in their own spiritual heritage, travelling different routes to the same goal' (Taylor 1999: 144).

While we might agree on norms of conduct, we may disagree about their underlying justification. Taylor argues that the Western rights tradition exists at both these levels. On the first level, is the legal culture of rights enforcements. This already runs into difficulties, being seen, as discussed above, by proponents of "Asian values" as dangerously individualistic, fragmenting and dissolving of community (Taylor 1999: 126). At the second level, and more problematically again, the Western rights tradition contains philosophical conceptions of human life which stress the incomparable importance of the human agent. Taylor argues that a philosophy of the person and society which emphasises the autonomous individual demanding their rights does not fit well with, for instance, the Confucian emphasis on close personal relationships or the Theravada Buddhist search for selflessness, self-giving and *dana* (generosity) (Taylor 1999: 128-9).

Taylor does not look to achieve an unforced consensus on universal human rights norms by overriding or "transcending" the particular norms of non-liberal cultures, but rather contends that there can be many different routes for arriving at a commitment to something like human rights. This is illustrated through the example of Theravada Buddhism. For instance, the new interpretation of the Buddhist

commitment to non-violence, which calls for respect for the autonomy of each person, and effectively demands a minimal use of coercion in human affairs, is illustrative of the idea that Buddhist philosophy might start from a quite different place to that of western human rights practice, and yet seems to ground many of the same norms. (Taylor 1999: 134). An unforced consensus would allow for a:

> profound sense of difference, of unfamiliarity, in the ideals, the notions of human excellence, the rhetorical tropes and reference points by which these norms become objects of deep commitment for us. To the extent that we can only acknowledge agreement with people who share the whole package and are moved by the same heroes, the consensus will either never come or must be forced (Taylor 1999: 136).

Taylor sees the unforced consensus on human rights, in which there is a convergence on certain norms but no mutual understanding of the very different philosophical and spiritual backgrounds amongst parties to the agreement, as only an initial stage. The agreement will remain fragile unless deeper understanding follows. What is needed is for this to develop into something like a Gadamerian fusion of horizons, in which the emphasis shifts to the need for mutual learning and understanding, and through which 'the moral universe of the other becomes less strange' (Taylor 1999: 136-7). We may give different priorities to norms in a continual process of negotiation and renegotiation. This requires mutual understanding of the particular places from which the negotiators speak. One important reason for this is the need for mutual respect. If the sense is strong on each side that the spiritual basis of the other is ridiculous, false, inferior, and unworthy, this will cause contempt and resentment and thus make the achievement of agreement more difficult (Taylor 1999: 138).

Taylor analytically distinguishes consensus from mutual understanding. While in some cases he sees the achievement of these as happening sequentially in successive phases, achieving a level of consensus before gaining wider understanding, in many cases, some degree of mutual understanding is an essential condition of reaching the consensus (Taylor 1999: 138). Tying in with the method of the "world travelling" approach, this involves looking at our own complex history as a condition for understanding the context of the other. Taylor writes that:

> Only if we in the West can recapture a more adequate view of our own history, can we learn to understand better the spiritual ideas that have been interwoven in our development and hence be prepared to understand sympathetically the spiritual paths of others toward the converging goal (Taylor 1999: 144).

The changes that would allow for an unforced consensus would involve redefinitions of identity which can be a difficult task; while throwing off a traditional identity can be an act of liberation, 'without an alternative sense of identity, the loss of the traditional one is disorientating and potentially unbearable' (Taylor 1999: 140). Identity redefinition will be more easily effected the more it is presented as being continuous with the most important traditions and reference points of the culture. Correspondingly, it gets maximally difficult when it comes across as a brutal break with the past involving a condemnation and rejection of it (Taylor 1999: 140). While how successful this is depends in part on developments within society, it depends also on relations with the outside world, particularly the West. As Taylor explains:

> The more the outside portrayal, or attempt at influence, comes across as a blanket condemnation of or contempt for the tradition, the more the dynamic of a "fundamentalist" resistance to all redefinition tends to get in train, and the harder it will be to find unforced consensus. This is a self-reinforcing dynamic, in which perceived external condemnation helps to feed extreme reaction, in a vicious spiral. The world is already drearily familiar with this dynamic in the unhealthy relation between the West and great parts of the Islamic world in our time (Taylor 1999: 140).

So while a convergence between the norms of Western humanism and reform Buddhism might be seen as the first phase toward an unforced consensus on universal norms, preceding a phase in which deeper understanding and mutual learning takes place, it might be that greater sympathetic understanding of the situation of each party by the other is necessary before any convergence on norms might be achieved (Taylor 1999: 140).

Taylor argues that many in the West tend to see the human rights doctrine as simply arising out of the falling away of previous countervailing ideas that have now been discredited. Thus they 'tend to think that the path to convergence requires that others too cast off their traditional ideas, that they even reject their religious heritage, and become "unmarked" moderns like us' (Taylor 1999: 143-4). For Taylor, this involves

an inadequate view of our own history. Cross-cultural convergence requires not the denial of traditions, but greater understanding between different world-views, an important part of which is gaining a better understanding of our own history.

The contention here is that the description of universalism found in Taylor's account is more convincing than that found in either Walzer's reiterative account or Rorty's ethnocentric defence of human rights, and better able to respond to the demands of universalism and particularity; connection and difference. Whilst universal moral values are seen as in no way contingent, how they are to be justified is rightly subject to variation according to context. This need not be seen as worryingly transient to the moral philosopher, but rather as reflecting the lack of total commensurability which is at some level a feature of all discourse, but which is in most instances, with care, successfully overcome in practice.

6. Human rights in transition

The above discussion suggests that a commitment to a certain kind of universalism can be compatible with cultural sensitivity. In our dialogue with different 'thick' moralities we see not just a contingently reiterated pattern of overlap, but rather, through these encounters, we open up a space for "newness" – a space of *creativity* – which fosters a new community of shared values. This chapter has argued that building on the existing consensus on universal values must crucially respect our differences as well as our connectedness. Kymlicka suggests that where there is conflict between "local practices" and "transnational human rights standards", the source of the conflict is not usually to be found in any deep-going "cultural difference" or inherent incompatibility between certain cultures and traditions and human rights, but rather in issues of ethno-cultural injustice and the perception that human rights are used as a tool for subordinating one people to another (Kymlicka 1998: 17, 24-5). Thus it is crucial to demonstrate the true universal potential of human rights, not just to assert it (Gatens 2004: 293).

Ricoeur suggests that human rights are an example of what Rawls calls a *reflective equilibrium* between universality and historicity. The language of human rights is not

imposed upon existing cultural values, but rather works in a backwards and forwards dialectic with tradition and convention in order to carry second-order convictions to the level of "considered convictions" (Ricoeur 1992: 288). This recalls Gatens's view that abstract human rights must negotiate with the particular embedded norms of specific cultures. Thus they act as 'second order' norms – reflectively endorsed norms through which the various social imaginaries that 'help structure the clustering of first order norms' may be challenged. Importantly, *such negotiation will necessarily be a two-way street* (Gatens 2004: 293).

The meanings of human rights are not fixed and stable. Human rights are not thick but must be worked out in concrete cultural contexts. Ignatieff writes that they are misconceived as a 'breviary of values...they do not, in themselves, resolve arguments' (Ignatieff 1999: 320-1). Instead, universal values will have to be interpreted and attached to the culture of particular societies. For example, respect for human life, whilst agreed upon as a universal value, will be understood differently in different societies in regards to where human life begins and ends and what respect for it entails (Parekh 2000: 135). As noted above, this varies within "civilisations" as well as between them. Universal values will be more fully realised where we understand the role played by the local in 'specifying and illuminating the universal' (Mohanty 2003: 224).

If human rights are understood in terms which resonate with the social imaginary of particular cultures and religions, and the more they are accepted through international discourse as valid within the frame of reference of each culture, the more they are likely to be implemented in that society (An-Na'im 1999b: 153).[71] One fruitful way of proceeding here might lie in what Abdullahi An-Na'im calls 'the cultural mediation of human rights' (An-Na'im 1999b: 147), which is comparable to Taylor's vision of achieving an unforced consensus discussed above. This strategy contends that particular cultural traditions contain within them sufficient resources for justifying and increasing local commitment to values and practices that in the West are typically realized through the culture of human rights (An-Na'im 1999b: 154). One way of

[71] An-Na'im also questions the extent to which human rights might be viewed as the exclusive product of Western societies, since he contends that there has already been a significant degree of non-Western contribution to the formulation and implementation of the international human rights culture (An-Na'im 1999b: 152-3).

achieving this within religiously centred states is to develop the ways in which human rights can be seen as attached to the central norms of the religion.

Coomaraswamy argues that, to avoid alienating religiously committed persons, it is essential to refrain from suggestions that it is the religion as such that produces practices which result in the violation and abuse of human rights, and to argue that the spirit of all the world's religions is supportive of human rights and that it is only the way in which these have been interpreted by man (since it usually is 'man') that is problematic (Coomaraswamy 1999: 84). Offering alternative interpretations (by both indigenous and external persons) of "authentic" and core texts and traditions is one way of doing this which is able to be sensitive to these cross-cultural issues. This involves looking at how traditions and beliefs within cultures and religions can be interpreted so as to be compatible with the general drive of human rights.

For example, some Muslim women's groups have contended that in their daily battles a great deal more progress is achieved by working within their religious and cultural paradigm, rather than appealing to external rights (Othman 1999: 192). The Sisters of Islam are an autonomous, nongovernmental organization of Muslim women in Malaysia who challenge the interpretations of Islam which have been used by powerful forces to justify patriarchal practices (Bell 1999: 854). This group argues for women's rights in terms that are locally persuasive and authentic. The assumption here is that building human rights on traditional cultural resources, on the customs and values that people use to make sense of their lives, is more likely to lead to long-term commitment to human rights ideas and practices. Defending rights by appealing to "human moral principles" is seen to be ineffective, if not counterproductive (Bell 1999: 854).

This example displays the complex hybrid mixtures and forms of accommodation that take place between human rights language and local traditions. Human rights are invoked by those within cultures not in order to transcend their culture, but to empower them in reshaping and reinterpreting it. This complex negotiation between the universal and the particular is seen for example in the efforts of women in Afghanistan, who use human rights talk to defend their right to education and health care, while at the same time insisting that they wish to be faithful to Muslim traditions

with respect to female decency, marriage and participation in public life (Ignatieff 1999: 320).

The cultural mediation of human rights can play an important role in promoting dialogue and consensus on human rights. The strategy of grounding human rights in local cultures should not be understood, as Rorty would seem to hold, as part of an identity politics the goal of which is the preservation of cultures, but rather of constructing good arguments for why human rights are central to that culture.[72] It enables intellectuals or human rights advocates within non-Western societies, in which the term "human rights" invites certain suspicions and antipathies from the government, the military, and religious leaders, to say '"Look, human rights are not alien. They are already in the teachings of *our* religion (culture, customs, etc.)"' (Yasuaki 1999: 109). However this approach itself carries dangers. For one, cultures and religions are dynamic and constantly changing. While exploring the sources of compatibility with human rights within so-called authentic traditions and texts can be an important way of expanding the inclusivity of human rights discourse and grounding them within local cultures or religions, this can also back up a static and conservative conception of culture. As Yasuaki notes, it is important to look not only to original teachings, but also to 'cultures or religions that are actually "living" in peoples' ordinary lives' (Yasuaki 1999: 121).

As Taylor has argued, while human rights might be justified in various ways according to different cultures, it is important to go beyond this. We must aim to reach a level of understanding of each other, not just a *modus vivendi*, to use Rawls's terms. In contrast to Walzer, we should look to build new communities, to form a new horizon. This is suggested by the language of human rights "culture". This can be compared to the idea of imagined community referred to in the previous chapter: this culture does not transcend our local cultures, but is rather mediated through it. Nussbaum suggests that universalist values can build their own communities – 'communities of resourcefulness, friendship, and agency, embedded in the local scene

[72] Identities are important not because all cultures are inherently worth something, or should be preserved, which according to Rorty is the view of identity theories (see Rorty 1999: 70), but simply because people *have* identities, people *are* rooted, and will feel alienated or included depending how ideas are presented in relation to their identities.

but linked in complex ways to groups of women in other parts of the world' (Nussbaum 1999: 48-49).[73]

If this culture is to widen and become stronger, all the parties to it must feel that they are equal partners in dialogue. Once again looking at the issues from the perspective of world travelling is illuminating. As we have previously seen, the world travelling approach argues for a method of understanding that combines both the requirement that we seek to understand and respect the separateness or independence of the "other" and to recognise our connectedness and similarities (Gunning 1991-2: 201-2). As such, it can be understood to articulate a version of "thin universalism". For Gunning, international human rights law must be mediated through a multicultural dialogue and a search for areas of overlap, of shared concerns and values. The task of understanding the context and condition of the "other" is to be performed with "playfulness", used not in the sense of "joyfulness" but rather to indicate an *open* rather than a *fixed* stance. The aim is not to cast judgement on the other, but rather to achieve an attitude of openness that rejects abstract rules. This requires an '*openness to surprise*' which allows for the possibilities of changes that might be made to our own horizon, as well as that of the other (Gunning 1991-2: 204, Lugones 1989: 16).

If the possibilities for mutual learning were to be acknowledged by both Western and non-Western countries, this would powerfully shift the tone of a cross-cultural dialogue on human rights. Dallmayr offers an example of this "mutual learning",

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[73] Nussbaum suggests her own way of articulating universal values whilst allowing room for the cultural mediation of these, which she calls the 'capabilities approach'. This suggests that we can identify a list of core human capabilities which are fundamental to any fully human life. The focus is on capabilities, not functions. Central human functional capabilities range from freedom from premature death, good health, security against violent assault, to being able to love, grieve, experience longing, laugh, and being able to form and revise a conception of the good, to live with concern for other animals and nature (Nussbaum 1999: 34).

Whilst this list is comprehensive, the capabilities approach is not anti-historicist; it makes room for differences of context in several important ways. Firstly, it is open-ended and nonexhaustive. It does not say that these are the only important things, only that 'this is a group of especially important functions on which we can agree to focus for political purposes' (Nussbaum 1999: 47). In this way it is more closely aligned with a political rather than a comprehensive form of liberalism (Nussbaum 1999b: 110). Secondly, the list allows for the possibility of 'multiple specifications of each of its components' (Nussbaum 1999: 47). Particular specifications are arrived at through public dialogue between those immersed in the particular concrete context and are open to contestation. In Nussbaum's words: 'We should use the list to criticize injustice, but we should not say anything at all without rich and full information' (Nussbaum 1999: 47).

citing Tu Weiming's appeal to human rights proponents and defenders of Confucianism to accept reciprocal challenges. From the one side, this might require the recognition that Confucian personality ideals might be realised more fully in liberal-democratic society. From the other, beneficiaries of Western individual rights might do well to recognise the ways in which the human rights culture has been corrupted by excessive individualism (Dallmayr 2001: 61). Leaving open the possibility of learning from other cultures may mean that our own categories of what is important are challenged, indeed we may choose to adopt some 'foreign' practices. For example, Bell observes that East Asian societies influenced by Confucianism strongly emphasize the idea that children have a duty to care for their elderly parents. In political practice, this means that parents have a right to be cared for by their children. Bell contends that it is not inconceivable that through cross-cultural dialogue non-East Asian states may come to regard the value of filial piety as important. If arguments for the right to be cared for by adult children were to become sufficiently persuasive to non-Asian participants, all parties might agree that this value should be included in the consensus on human rights (Bell 1999: 853).

Ricoeur also views this openness as essential. He argues that we must reject casting human rights as ethnocentrism and instead affirm a paradox:

> on the one hand, one must maintain the universal claim attached to a few values where the universal and the historical intersect, and on the other hand, one must submit this claim to discussion, not on a formal level, but on the level of the convictions incorporated in concrete forms of life. *Nothing can result from this discussion unless every party recognizes that other potential universals are contained in so-called exotic cultures* (Ricoeur 1992: 289, italics added).

The world travelling approach suggests that in order to foster equal dialogue between those from different cultural or religious backgrounds it is necessary to look at our own historical context,[74] attempt to see ourselves as the "other" might see us, and attempt to understand others within their own complex cultural context. This helps break down the view of the "enlightened liberal West" casting judgement on an "uncivilised" other who is different from us.

[74] Walzer and Taylor both suggest that looking at our own history is a good way of becoming more sympathetic to the situation of others.

One important aspect of this in relation to human rights is an awareness of the fact that human rights discourse takes place against the background of the West's colonial history. Yasuaki highlights a lack of understanding of the psychological legacy of imperialism and colonial rule. He notes that nations which come under criticism for human rights abuses tend to be those nations that were once under colonial rule and the victims of military intervention and economic exploitation by developed countries:

> Because of this humiliating past, they tend to respond to criticism by the developed countries in an excessively sensitive manner. For those who have experienced colonial rule and interventions under such beautiful slogans as "humanity" and "civilization," the term "human rights" looks like nothing more than another beautiful slogan by which great powers rationalize their interventionist policies (Yasuaki 1999: 104-5).

Criticising violations of human rights from the outside whilst failing to engage with the religions, cultures and social customs of particular communities may be regarded as an arrogant intervention by external powers (Yasuaki 1999: 108).[75] Universal principles are more likely to be effectively enforced if the justifications are attached to the wider imaginaries of which they are a part. For example in the case of female genital surgeries, if an international treaty banning the practice is realised, it might not be wise to pressure or embarrass national governments to enforce it at the domestic level. A more effective approach might involve a contextual emphasis on more open health or educational efforts that allows feminists and women within cultures in which the practice occurs to continue the process of change within their own cultures (Gunning 1991-2: 241). This allows for sensitivity where women's human rights require a shift in a traditional identity which is tied up with a particular role for women (for instance, the women involved in the rituals where female genital

[75] Yasuaki observes that in the literature focussed on developing the "cultural or religious bases" of human rights in non-Western cultures, or "enlightened interpretations" of non-Western religions to be compatible with human rights, there is the assumption that only non-Western religions or cultures have difficulties with grounding human rights (Yasuaki 1999: 120). However, this is not the case. For example, referring to the implicit identification in much contemporary human rights discourse of political and civil rights with human rights generally, it is necessary to analyse the tension between American individualism and their hostility to social and economic rights (Yasuaki 1999: 112-3, 120-1). This tendency once again reinforces a dynamic of "us" and "them" which fosters resentment rather than equal dialogue.

surgeries are performed, who see this as an important part of their identity as women and as members of their community). A contextual approach to human rights enforcement can be crucial where the activities in question are "cultural", since governments often deny responsibility. Unlike human rights abuses such as torture or genocide, in the case of cultural practices, the act is openly acknowledged and defended. Governments might not be involved, as the practice is sustained by private citizens (Gunning 1991-2: 238). Therefore applying absolute and abstract rules is inappropriate to attempts to achieve reform. The weakness in the enforcement mechanisms of the human rights system, and the aspirational focus and flexibility and openendedness of human rights, are seen as a strength that can allow it to address culturally challenging issues with the complexity that is required by cross-cultural understanding (Gunning 1991-2: 194, 241).

The dialogical relationship between cultural norms and human rights is two-way. On the one hand, human rights become contextualised within thick concrete societies, the meanings of which are subject to variation. On the other, and importantly, the universal reach of human rights provides an important tool to support women and other vulnerable persons in their freedom to, in Gatens's words, 'participate in the reimagining and reinvention of the traditions and values of their respective cultures' (Gatens 2004: 293). Those who argue that human rights are an "alien" imposition and are not compatible with cultural traditions are often seeking to protect *their* interpretations of these traditions from internal challenge. Thus, when individual members demand their human rights, they often do so in order to be able to participate in the community's process of interpreting its traditions (Kymlicka 1998: 17-8, n. 24).[76] In doing so, it is not a case of fixed universal standards being applied to and changing the particular, but rather of the two working in dialogue with each other. Ignatieff argues that human rights language has become:

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[76] Reframing women's rights in terms of "human rights" can importantly shift their status. For instance, violence against women was constructed as a violation of women's human rights and thus of human rights for the first time at the 1993 UN conference in Vienna (Walby 2002: 128). This reconfiguring of violence against women has massive implications for how it is perceived, one being that it makes it an issue in which all humanity is considered to have an interest, rather than a feminist issue (Walby 2002: 128). Framing these "private" acts in terms of human rights makes governments accountable and reflects a willingness to pressure governments to do something about them, even if attempts to enforce this will be ineffective and might do more harm than good (Gunning 1991-2: 238-9).

> a hybridized vernacular in which the victims of traditional society mount their claims against the ethical claim of community. In every context this demand for freedom will mean something different, and it will not necessarily mean what is meant in the West. The legitimacy of human rights is not so much its authoritative universalism, so much as its capacity to become a moral vernacular for the demand for freedom within local cultures (Ignatieff 1999: 320).

I have argued that human rights universalism is compatible with sensitivity to cultural difference since, rather than involving a necessary "clash" between the universal and the particular, it can be seen as emerging from a dialogue which embodies a complex two-way dynamic between universals and particular norms. The universalism of human rights is to be seen as an on-going task in which the need for cross-cultural understanding is made central. In Fred Dallmayr's words, this view would treat

> universality not as a *fait accompli*, but rather as a hope or yearning; above all, it [would deprive] any given culture—especially Western culture—of pretensions to monopolize universal "truth," placing its trust instead in the difficult process of interactive dialogue potentially enlisting participants around the globe (Dallmayr 2001: 65).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have argued that human rights are best characterised not as the imposition of one culture's values on another but as the gradual emergence of normative consensus over time. This view is backed up by their articulation as customary international norms. Thus they embody a thin universal agreement on certain core norms, which can be backed up from within various culturally specific backgrounds. The contention is that this can become solidified into a new horizon. The human rights culture can be thought of as a new language which has evolved out of our common conversations. Thick cultural norms and thin (but crucially important) universal principles exist in a dialogical interchange or reflective equilibrium in which both can be expected to be changed by the encounter.

CONCLUSION

In the course of this thesis I have emphasised that the task of understanding one another across the "firm but open" boundaries of culture and identity presents one of the most pressing challenges of our political age. Whilst diversity is hardly a new phenomenon, certain features of the contemporary world, including developments in technology, the heightened threat of cross-cultural terrorism, and the powerful role of the media, throw up particular problems that give that give accentuated urgency to the need for understanding between different cultural "horizons".

This thesis has argued that given the short-comings of many communitarian and liberal responses to diversity, it is necessary to defend a certain type of multiculturalism in order to respond adequately to the complex challenges presented by the need to foster cross-cultural understanding and connection. Attending to the historicity of the self and the other, and to difference in a deep sense, is, I have argued, crucial in achieving cross-cultural understanding. Procedural liberal theory and its abstract view of the individual are unable to respond adequately to the complexities of individuals and are unable to accommodate their deep attachments. This position was explored initially through discussing the literature of multiculturalism or the 'politics of recognition'. In its varied forms, this literature argues that the failure of "impartial" or "difference blind" liberalism to take into account the extent to which the state is itself culturally biased towards the majority culture leads it to be inherently assimilative and unequal in its effects. Multicultural theorists thus contend that truly equal treatment requires recognition not just of individuals, but of individuals as members of groups.

The important insights within this literature, including its focus on the deep bonds of individuals to their cultural and religious context and the intersubjective character of understanding, have formed the starting point for my argument within this thesis. However, I have contended that the concepts of culture and identity at work in theories of multicultural recognition at times fail to be sufficiently complex. Cultures are not static and closed entities, but are, rather, complex and dynamic, externally

overlapping, and internally diverse and subject to constant reinterpretation. The danger is that in making groups as well as individuals the starting point for political thinking, theories of multiculturalism risk essentialising and reifying culture and reinforcing the ability of some to assert their interpretations of cultural identity over others. In focusing on the wider group as the bearer of cultural rights, there is a propensity to privilege the understandings of the dominant elites within groups and thus to affirm the existing power structures within them. Similarly, focusing on inequalities between groups can have the converse effect of reinforcing unequal arrangements within them. Women within cultures, I have argued, are often particularly susceptible to this "paradox of vulnerability".

In order to illustrate the complexity of culture and identity I explored the rich textual portrayals of the human predicament available to us in Anglo-Indian literature. My purpose in using the literature has been to gain a more complete and richer conception of the individual and her complex attachments than that found within much liberal and multicultural theory. The picture of cultures in the Indian context is one of intricate overlap and interconnection, of which it makes little sense to speak in terms of cohesive and authentic identities. The identities of individuals do not neatly coincide with the borders of groups; rather, the extreme of the "migrant" can be seen to stand as a metaphor for human kind in general.

However, at the same time, what is portrayed in the Anglo-Indian literature is not the liberal individualist view of a "kaleidoscope of cultures", from which the individual freely chooses the parts of her identity, but one in which individuals possess deep roots to their cultural and religious communities, the tearing up of which is not easy, but a matter of negotiation with oneself, and with others within, without and between cultures. Thus the picture of identity to emerge is one both of continuity and fluidity, of constant identity amid difference. Individuals are both rooted and capable of movement; whilst we are capable of creativity, this creativity is constrained by our circumstances.

In response to this picture of complexity, the central problem with which my thesis has been concerned is that of how to forge a position which is sensitive to cultural diversity, yet which resists essentialising and reifying identities, and ossifying

individuals within cultures. Tied to this is the question of in what sense we may speak of 'different cultural horizons', whilst avoiding its radically relativist implications. The central task has been to find a balance between, on the one hand, sensitivity to the demands of culture and identity and to the "rootedness" of persons, and on the other, to the connections between persons, and the fact that individuals are not wholly defined by their roots. Here I have invoked Wittgenstein's metaphor of family resemblance in order to build a view of cultures which can attend to their reality without essentialising them, and without obscuring the connections between them. Whilst there are similarities to be found between particular cultures, no one thread runs continuously through all. Cultures are woven of many strands, and some of these strands will be shared by those who's identities otherwise diverge.

Against this background of the conception of culture and identity as constituted by change and continuity, the object of my thesis has been to develop a dialogical contextual approach which is able to respond both to our differences and our interconnectedness. I have developed my argument through a discussion of Gadamer's hermeneutic position and the feminist approach of "world travelling", through which it has been argued that taking account of difference is crucial to the fostering of connection. Gadamer's position is used to demonstrate that it is an ontological condition of understanding that the interpreter and the object to be interpreted are situated within their own historical horizons. Through Gunning and Lugones' world travelling account this point is extended to provide a method for approaching difficult cross-cultural issues. We must in some sense "travel" to the world of the other, which importantly requires not just engagement with the context from which the other speaks, but also that we attempt to gain a deeper understanding of our own historical context, and the assumptions and 'prejudices' therein.

The impetus for this kind of contextual multicultural approach is to acknowledge that groups do not keep their identities unchanged and intact over time, and that it is delusional to think that they can. There may be different degrees of change, and some cultures may be more traditionalist than others, but all are subject to cross-cultural interactions that force identities to go beyond their present resting points. The implication is that if we are to avoid these changes being 'dictated' by the dominant

culture there is an imperative to help foster, create, and maintain conditions of cross-cultural interaction, which can take place on equal terms.

The defence of cultural sensitivity is not made, then, on grounds of the protection of cultures, but is rather aimed at fostering the conditions for cross-cultural understanding and dialogue in which people do not feel the need to choose between the parts of their "hybrid" identities. Through enabling persons to feel secure in their identity, it is contended that this kind of multiculturalism does not lead to fragmentation and ghettoisation but rather to a multiculturally constituted common culture which encourages the conditions for the fostering of multi-way dialogical connection or a "fusion of horizons". Thus integration between various communities in society is crucial; however, integration is not in this view of things assimilation, but rather seen as a complex reciprocal process in which the porous surface of cultures allow the seepage of others to penetrate and change their internal features. Achieving this requires a certain attitude of multicultural openness in which all groups can expect to be changed by the encounter.

The need for this kind of reciprocal multicultural integration was illustrated through a discussion of the events surrounding the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. Here the point was not to offer an argument for whether the book should or should not have been banned, but rather to draw attention to the fact that the context in which multicultural debates take place is important, and thus the need to take a contextual rather than an abstract approach to issues of diversity. Since the means of public communication are subject to the suffusion of the dominant culture, the lack of an avenue for minority voices is alienating and may exacerbate misunderstandings between groups by falsely homogenizing them. The response both of the majority culture and liberal observers in the case of the "Rushdie affair" effectively cast all protestors as "fundamentalists" and tied the defence of the novel to the British way of life, 'the way we do things here'. This served to reinforce the perception of British Muslims as 'outsiders', and limited the space in which they might simultaneously hold the British and the Islamic aspects of their identity.

The breakdown in communication in this affair highlights the need for a contextual approach to issues of diversity. In making sense of agents it is imperative that we

attempt to engage with their own self-descriptions. Unless we assume the intersubjectivity of meanings and take seriously the embeddedness of self and other we will end up projecting, usually unwittingly, our meanings onto others, and thus defining others in our own terms rather than first trying to gain a preliminary understanding in theirs. In cross-cultural evaluations, failure to attend to the context in which practices take place can lead to simplified accounts of cultures and traditions. Applying abstract standards can obscure the indigenous strands of reform and complex processes of change and negotiation that take place within cultures. This can effectively present "other" cultures as static and unchanging, as "places without history".

It is crucially important, however, that we not replace our own accounts by simply accepting the self-descriptions of the other. We cannot simply 'suspend' critical judgement in order to appreciate and adopt the rationality of the cultures in which the subject we wish to comprehend resides. As I have discussed in the context of women and culture, even in the unlikely event in which all within a culture were agreed on a norm or practice, this would not be sufficient to call it just. In the much more common instances in which cultural norms and practices are contested, the acceptance of dominant understandings can reinforce the subjection of vulnerable groups within groups (for example, members of lower castes). Since cultures are characterised by internal multiplicity and fluidity, it is crucial to interrogate exactly to whose terms, whose traditions, we are deferring in projects of cultural sensitivity (Nussbaum 1999: 37).

The argument has been that taking seriously the different horizons of the self and other allows the space for dialogue between horizons to be opened up; and that where understanding between horizons is at some level achieved, we might have what Gadamer calls a "fusion of horizons". Thus I have suggested that, rather than segregating communities, recognising the distance between us conversely allows greater space in which our connections can emerge. This importantly insists on the possibilities for a "thin" universalism, to use Walzer's term. It has been contended that if the dynamic view of culture is made central, it is possible to construct a position of cultural sensitivity which can respond to the situatedness of the subject

whilst neither restricting the internal multiplicity of culture and identity nor surrendering the grounds on which to question the status quo.

The argument has been that if we take seriously the multiplicity found within cultural and religious communities, cultural sensitivity does not have to lead to a conservative position. The cultural need not be juxtaposed against the universal, but rather the universal and the particular are seen to work in dialogue with each other. The universal does not exist at some point 'above' the local, but rather can be seen as coming out of, and being strengthened through, dialogue and cross-cultural interaction. Rather than the cultural being in tension with the universal, the space of contested norms within cultures, or the social imaginary, can provide a middle ground for negotiation between universal rights and cultural norms. It has been contended that human rights can be understood as an example of this concrete universalism. Thus my thesis has contended that a dialogical contextual position is able to accommodate the situatedness of the subject and the importance of tradition, whilst avoiding the charge of being conservative and conforming to the here and now.

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