CHAPTER 31

MULTICULTURALISM
AND IDENTITY

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INTRODUCTION

Issues of culture, identity, and difference appeared on the feminist academic and political agenda through two different discourses, those of liberal multiculturalism and critical multiculturalism. Both fully developed in the 1990s but kept a careful distance from each other.

The liberal discourse started as an exposition of the political reasoning behind the official politics of multiculturalism as it had been embraced by Western immigration countries like Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom since the early 1970s. In these countries, in response to the claims by native and immigrant minorities, a practice had grown of accommodating minority cultures. Liberal multiculturalism holds that individuals have not only civil, political, and social rights but also the right to speak their own language and live according to their own culture and religion. For this reason, minority groups are entitled to equal respect for their cultural identity, and they need group rights to protect their cultural identity. As awareness grew that minority cultures may include practices that are harmful to women, feminists worried that group rights might be granted at the expense of minority women. For instance, they feared that, out of respect for minority cultures, governments would recognize polygamy or condone forced marriages. This gave rise to what is now referred to as the multiculturalism versus feminism or the minorities within minorities debate (see also the chapters by Judith Squires and by Birte Siim in this volume).
The discourse of critical multiculturalism started as an interrogation of the social and political drawbacks of liberal multiculturalism. It was inspired by (Black) feminist and poststructuralist perspectives on politics and power that challenged the individualistic bias of liberalism. People's behavior and ways of thinking should be interpreted not as the outcome of autonomous and rational deliberation but as predominantly determined by their position within a society stratified along lines of class, gender, racial, and age differences. These scholars insisted that members of minority groups did not so much need more (individual or collective) rights but a transformation of society as a whole. While discussions about the possibility and limits of liberal multiculturalism took place among social and political philosophers and scientists, critical multiculturalism was mainly developed (and disputed) within the humanities, more specifically in areas such as women's studies, African American studies, and cultural studies.

In this chapter we will describe these two discourses of multiculturalism and focus on two persistent questions that came up time and again in both discourses: questions regarding the tensions between universalism and relativism; and questions regarding the conception of the subject and individual autonomy. The first refers to the dilemma that feminists want to speak out against gender injustices, whether in our own or in another culture, yet feel hesitant to judge the lives of women in other cultural traditions. This anxiety derives from the fear of repeating the colonial and racist gesture of imposing Western values as if they were universal values. The second issue originates in the fact that criteria that determine a person's autonomy are contested. If some women defend their right to live by traditions that in the eye of others merely endorse their subordinate position, should their choice be rejected because they thereby show a lack of autonomy, or does their position suggest that dominant notions of the subject and autonomy are in need of revision? We will argue that, within both the liberal and the critical discourse of multiculturalism, interesting "third" positions have been elaborated around conceptions of democratic dialogue, contextual reasoning, and narrative identity that offer promising ways out of these intricate problems.

**LIBERAL MULTICULTURALISM**

One of the most influential theorists of multiculturalism is the Canadian philosopher Will Kymlicka. In *Multicultural Citizenship*, Kymlicka (1995) observed that not only in Canada but also in many countries around the world indigenous minorities were given group rights to help them preserve their culture. Kymlicka developed a framework that aimed to provide the theoretical foundation for this practice. Kymlicka's central idea is that to become autonomous individuals we need culture. We decide what is important to us and how
we want to lead our lives, but it is our culture that provides us with meaningful options and that defines and structures our world. This means that our culture is the inescapable context of our autonomy (83–84). Second, our culture gives us a sense of identity and a sense of natural belonging to a community (89). This aspect of autonomy and identity building is why culture is important for us.

Fairness requires that members of minority groups have an equal right to their societal culture (Kymlicka 1995, 86). One does not have an equal opportunity to choose a life of, say, a hunter-gatherer if one cannot experience that life. To be able to offer their members a rich context of choice, minority cultures sometimes need protection. The hunter-gatherer minority may need special land rights to ward off the wood-cutting industry. Or minorities may need language rights to educate their children in their own language or the right to practice their customary law. Hence, a concern for individual well-being may require certain group-differentiated rights, so claims Kymlicka, and his defense of group rights ultimately rests on the liberal values of individual autonomy and freedom. This is why his theory became a landmark: hitherto it was believed that a defense of group rights could be based only on a communitarian outlook that gives group rights priority over the rights of individuals.

Susan Moller Okin (1999), however, doubts whether any politics of multiculturalism, even of Kymlicka’s (1995) liberal kind, can really guarantee the rights of women while simultaneously granting a particular minority group rights to uphold its own culture or religion. Most cultures, so runs her argument, have as their principal aim the control of women’s sexuality and reproductive capacities by men. This control is expressed in cultural rules that regulate the lives of women in the community. Polygamy, forced marriage, divorce systems biased against women, and culturally licensed sexual harassment (e.g., marriage through rape) are all expressions of a worldview that considers women as inferior to men and all deny women the right to decide over their own bodies and lives. Okin believes that many minority cultures are patriarchal, often more so than the surrounding majority culture. This being so, group rights might function as a license for minorities to oppress their women (and other vulnerable group members) (Okin 1999, 16–17). From a feminist perspective, Okin argues, multiculturalism is not part of the solution but part of the problem. Similar concerns were articulated in Europe by Wikan (2002), Hirsi Ali (2006), Amara (2003), and Kelek (2005) and in Canada by Manji (2005).

Is Multiculturalism Bad for Feminism?
The Accused Talk Back

Okin’s (1999) essay sparked the multiculturalism versus feminism debate. How did the accused react? Kymlicka (1995) shared Okin’s concerns. Group rights should in his view not be misused to oppress individual group members: “I have defended the right of national minorities to maintain themselves as culturally
distinct societies, but only if, and in so far as, they are themselves governed by liberal principles" (153). To avoid misuse he made a distinction between external protections and internal restrictions. Minority rights aim to protect the minority group against the larger society, but they should not restrict the basic liberties of its own members. Kymlicka is convinced that many group rights meet this condition and that Okin's dismissal of minority group rights in general is unwarranted (Kymlicka 1999, 32).

Bhikhu Parekh (1999), another multiculturalist, responds with a question: minority cultures are asked to conform to fundamental liberal values, but what is the meaning of these values? There is among liberals no unanimity about this. Moreover, the content of values may vary according to contexts. Parekh accuses Okin (1999) of liberal fundamentalism because she suggests that there is only one and undisputed set of liberal values, and that liberalism is the better view of life. "From a multicultural perspective," he writes, "the liberal view of life is culturally specific and neither self-evident nor the only rational or true way to organize human life;...liberal relations with non-liberal cultures should be based not on dogmatically asserted liberal values but on a critical and open-minded dialogue" (74). Moreover, what if the women concerned do not share the view that they are oppressed? Against the idea that these women would all suffer from false consciousness he states "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).

Chandran Kukathas defends the most radical position in favor of cultural diversity, not by arguing for group rights but by being against any interference by the state in the internal life of minorities (see Kukathas 2003). He agrees with Okin (1999) that there is a conflict between feminism and multiculturalism, insofar as some groups do not accord women equal dignity, neglect women's interests, and seek (multicultural) accommodation of their traditions. But in his view, in cases where the interests of women conflict with the claims of culture, the latter should prevail (Kukathas 2001).

To understand this position, we need to know Kukathas's understanding of multiculturalism. Unlike Kymlicka (1995), Kukathas's (2003) theory is grounded not in the value of individual autonomy but in freedom of association and freedom of conscience. Kukathas's idea of a multicultural society is that of an association of associations. Minority groups have to be able to survive by their own strength, without the support of cultural group rights, but also without the state intervening in case of oppression of internal minorities. This does not end up in "a formula for creating a lot of private hells" (Barry 2001, 143), because those who wish "to go it alone" (Kukathas 2003, 140) can preserve their culture only if they succeed in making it attractive enough for people to remain members of that community.

It is of crucial importance then that group members have a right to exit, so that we can be sure that those who stay do so voluntarily. He realizes that this will not form a foolproof guarantee that no woman will be coerced to lead a life she does not want to lead. Daughters may be socialized into compliance
and therefore acquiescence. Yet he believes that the alternative, to use the power of the state to correct the power balance within minority families, is wrong, because there is no reason to assume that the state has superior knowledge about the good life. Likewise, he argues, if women are disempowered by their socialization into compliance, then they cannot be empowered by treating their preferences as inauthentic (Kukathas 2001, 96).

Among feminists there were also many who shared the multiculturalists' objections to Okin's (1999) essay. Okin wrongly assumes, according to Bonnie Honig (1999, 38), "that Western liberal regimes are simply and plainly 'less patriarchal' than other regimes, rather than differently so, perhaps worse in some respects and better in others." She illustrates her point with examples of women-friendly practices in non-Western cultures and sexist practices in American culture. For Azizah Y. Al-Hibri (1999, 41), Okin's essay exemplified a "Western patriarchal feminism" that would do third-world and minority women no good. Non-Western women have no need to be rescued by Western women. Moreover, "people of faith are entitled to their religious beliefs whether secular feminists approve of these beliefs or not" (44).

We do not intend to further reconstruct the debate, but it undoubtedly points to real problems we encounter when we want to address minority practices that are harmful to women. Okin (1999) is correct in drawing attention to these practices, and it is relevant to ask how public agencies can intervene against cultural practices that are harmful to women. Yet if we continue along the line of argument of Parekh (1999) and Honig (1999) we easily end up on a relativistic position: all cultures have their good and bad sides, and therefore we cannot say which one is the better one. Likewise, we think Kukathas (2001) rightly signaled that if women are disempowered by their socialization into compliance, then they cannot be empowered by treating their preferences as inauthentic. And even if they may not all be "misguided victims of indoctrination" (Parekh 1999, 73), is it not a bit too simplistic to assume, as Al-Hibri (1999) does, that they are capable enough to decide for themselves? How should we understand the autonomy and moral agency of women under cultural conditions that entail severe constraints (Baum 1997, 243)?

There is now a large and growing body of feminist writing exploring how liberal democracies should deal with minority practices, now also referred to as traditional harmful practices (THPs), which infringe on the rights of individuals, that is, women. How should we deal with the universalism–relativism issue and the problem of autonomy? In the following, we will discern four different liberal answers to this question.

Principle-Driven Liberalism

When confronted with the question of whether a practice should be tolerated, the principle-driven approach weighs the practice against liberal principles.
Within a true principle-driven liberal perspective, there is no a dilemma regarding universalism–relativism because liberal principles are considered as universal. This is clear, for instance, in the work of Martha Nussbaum (1999). Nussbaum’s perspective is based on the capabilities approach to human development elaborated with the economist Amartya Sen (1985). Given her universalism it comes as no surprise that Nussbaum is not afraid to judge other cultures. Female genital mutilation, for instance, is a practice that should be eradicated because it clearly limits women’s capabilities. A typical multiculturalist objection such as, “Isn’t it ethnocentric to hold one’s own culture as the benchmark for the principles and practices that are appropriate for all people?” is dismissed as utterly out of place (121–129). Regarding the capacity for autonomy of the women involved, Nussbaum writes, “Can the mothers of these girls make an informed choice as to the value of female sexual pleasure? They have been immersed in traditional beliefs about women’s impurity; lacking literacy and education, as a large proportion do, they have difficulty seeking out alternative paradigms….their situation is made more difficult by fear and powerlessness….they are highly likely to have experienced marriage and sexual life as a series of insults to their dignity, given the ubiquity of domestic violence and marital rape. Should they believe that [female genital mutilation] is a bad thing for their daughters…they have no power to make their choices effective” (127).

Because the mothers’ capacity for autonomy is seriously harmed by their cultural upbringing and their right to autonomy is severely curtailed, it is necessary to develop policies to protect these women from cultural oppression. Yet it is precisely this type of argument that third-world feminists have criticized as a colonial discourse that represents third-world women as passive victims who need an external force, others, to bring about change (see, e.g., Njambi 2004).

A principle-driven approach that is more sensitive to the critique that Western feminists should avoid paternalism is found in the work of Marilyn Friedman (2003). Friedman wants to prevent women from being forced to lead oppressive lives yet does not want to impose liberalism on nonliberal groups. Central to her approach is the concept of personal autonomy as the central principle that should be respected, but nonliberal cultures often do not value personal autonomy. Friedman solves this problem by making a distinction between a content-neutral conception of autonomy and a substantive conception of autonomy. The substantive autonomy of a choice depends on the content of what is chosen, requiring that these contents be consistent with the value of autonomy. The content-neutral autonomy of a choice depends only on the question of whether the choice is made under conditions of autonomy. A choice to live a life of total servility manner would not, following a substantive account of autonomy, qualify as an autonomous choice because a servile life is not consistent with the value of autonomy. However, according to the content-neutral account we should accept that choice if it is made autonomously.
What is the advantage of this distinction? We usually argue that a traditional practice like female genital cutting is such a bad thing that no woman would ever voluntarily choose it. The severity of the outcome and the content of the choice determine for us whether a choice is voluntary. This contains the risk, though, of a cultural bias that leads us to assume that if people consent to a practice that is very alien to us they are not really capable of autonomy. Friedman’s (2003) distinction helps to avoid this cultural trap. A critique on Friedman’s approach is that it is not clear what should happen to those whose choices do not meet the standards of procedural autonomy. Should their choices be ignored? That is odd, and particularly so given Friedman’s ambition to pay more respect to the choices of minority women (see Okin 2005, 79).

A Democratic Approach

In a democratic approach it is democratic deliberation that should define whether a practice is to be tolerated. The basic idea is that, after all have spoken, this public deliberation will have generated a compromise that all parties are willing to accept. If we are to decide on the toleration of oppressive practices, it is very important that those whose lives are most directly touched by it, and in particular the most vulnerable, young women, are consulted. What are their experiences? What are their views on their culture? And what are their views on possible interventions carried out on their behalf by the state in the group’s internal affairs?

According to Monique Deveaux (2005), the democratic approach requires that we listen to the voices of those engaged in a practice and thus hopefully prevent their autonomy from going unrecognized. She presents the case of the South African Customary Marriage Act to illustrate her views. There are two kinds of oppression present in this case. First, apartheid had oppressed the South African peoples and their customary laws. Second, the patriarchy of most of the customary laws oppressed women. If customary law was reformed so that it no longer is oppressive to women, then there would be little customary left about it. It would amount to abolition of the law instead of recognition, which after so many decades of cultural oppression under apartheid was unwanted. Instead, representatives of a wide range of groups were consulted, and there was much frank discussion about the actual lived practices of customary marriage. This led to a partial reform; women, for instance, got the right to initiate divorce, but polygamy was not outlawed—one of the concessions made to the chiefs. Not all were happy with the outcome, but the compromise reached was seen by most as a fair and legitimate outcome. Deveaux believes that a democratic solution to conflicts of culture is likely to yield more beneficial reform, and she expects this to have greater legitimacy. But there is no guarantee that this sort of procedure will lead to liberal, nondiscriminatory outcomes. We have to accept the outcome of the democratic deliberation, irrespective of its content.
While the principle-driven approach will not allow practices that conflict with liberal principles, despite what the majority of actors believes (hence is liberal, but not necessarily democratic), the democratic approach may allow practices that conflict with liberal principles because it feels bound to accept the outcome of democratic decision making (and hence is democratic but not necessarily liberal). In fact, Okin (2005) started from a principle-driven approach but later expressed her preference for a democratic approach.

The Institutional Approach

A third approach to liberal multiculturalism proposes to resolve the tension between respecting cultural difference and protecting women's rights by developing governance systems that divide the areas over which the state or the minority group has power. Institutional systems of shared governance should, on one hand, give public recognition to minority groups, and, on the other hand (minimally and hence less extensively), they should secure the rights of minority group women. An example is Ayelet Shachar's (2001) joint governance model. Shachar starts from the assumption that minority group women have an identity as both state citizens and minority group members and may have an interest in both. Joint governance, such as in the area of family law, might mean that the group be given the right to decide who by birth or marriage is a group member (family law's demarcating function), but the state has legal authority over the distributive aspects of family law, such as, in case of divorce, ownership of matrimonial property or entitlement to child custody. Joint governance would force the state and the minority group to cooperate with each other, as neither has enough power to resolve legal disputes without cooperation from the other authority. Thus, they are both forced to make trade-offs.

Shachar (2001) argues that this would not force minority women to choose between their culture and their rights. Moreover, she expects that with the two parties relegated to each other, minority women may be in a better position to renegotiate oppressive group traditions. Thus, she aims both to respect minority women's culturally defined interests (e.g., to remain in their cultural community) and to create more space for them to increase their autonomy.

A Contextualist Approach

Finally, we can distinguish an approach that claims that both liberalism and culture must be contextually understood. The most radical deconstruction of culture yet, combined with a plea for multicultural policies, is developed by British political theorist Anne Phillips (2007). Her critique of much of multicultural theory and its feminist critics alike is that in the debate about tensions between gender equality and cultural diversity, both have reified non-Western
or minority cultures as distinct and robust “things” that determine the beliefs and behavior of their members. This ignores the agency of non-Western people as if they were incapable of autonomy, for example, to choose for themselves how they want to shape their (cultural) identity. Non-Westerners are thus their (monolithic unchanging) culture, as either victims or perpetrators, while Westerners are influenced only by (plural, fluid, and changing) cultural environments. Phillips’s (2010) approach is based on “respect for culturally diverse individuals,” not “recognition of things called cultures” (10).

If one wants to know what measures are required as a matter of justice in the case of traditionally harmful practices, it is no use expecting that liberal principles will prescribe what to do. Liberal principles are generic, so runs the contextualist argument, and therefore too indeterminate for this task. One needs to immerse oneself in the specifics of a case and argue out how the different principles and interests at stake should be understood and balanced against each other and thus to reach a contextual sensitive judgment (see also Carens 2000).

To take an example, in the Dutch debate on sex selective abortion (SSA) the practice was discussed as an incomprehensible choice stemming from a misogynist culture. When we immerse ourselves in the background of SSA, we will find that the families involved often cannot afford the expensive dowry they are supposed to give their daughter in marriage. This is a culturally specific reason, yet it is one we can understand across cultures. We should therefore not assume too quickly that the women concerned are not capable of defining their interests. This does not mean that SSA is not a moral wrong. Policies against SSA are necessary, but they should take into account the culturally shaped identities of minority women. While the Dutch debate on SSA focused on whether the abortion law should be tightened to ban SSA, a contextual analysis would point to the necessity of a policy that tackles the cultural context that gives rise to requests for SSA (see Saharso 2005).

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**Critical Multiculturalism**

The liberal discourse of multiculturalism not only met with wholesale feminist rejections, as articulated by Okin (1999) and others, but also elicited feminist criticisms claiming that liberal thinkers had not sufficiently thought through the critical implications of the “multi” in multiculturalism. In a programmatic essay, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1994, 108) defined critical multiculturalism as a “project of organizing a critical culture primarily against capitalism, class exploitation, and consumer passivity.” Its adherents saw themselves as part of an academic movement that focused on the discursive empowerment
of marginal groups (Chicago Cultural Studies Group 1994, 124–126). It initiated
the development of, next to women's studies, new academic disciplines such
as African American studies, Chicana-Chicano studies, Black studies, and
cultural studies.

From these circles of critical scholars, at least six objections against lib-
eral multiculturalism are brought to the fore. First, liberal espousals of human
diversity ignore the actual inequalities and power differences between the dom-
inant (white, Western) majority and racial and ethnic minorities. American
Black feminist scholar bell hooks (1993), for instance, claims that sunny images
such as that of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition are nothing but a "perversion
of the progressive vision of cultural diversity" (238). Second, focusing on cul-
tural and ethnic differences has a politically divisive effect: the policy of equal
treatment to support all minority groups in maintaining their own identity
incites them to compete with one another about funds and resources instead
of fighting together against the shared predicaments of racism and discrimi-
nation (Davis 1996; Yuval-Davis 1999). Third, when adopted by big corpora-
tions as a market strategy to lure consumers into buying their products or as a
human resources strategy to manage diversity, liberal celebrations of diversity
have detrimental homogenizing effects. Thus, Donna Haraway (1997) resists
what she calls the ever returning "Sacred Image of the Same" in advertisement
campaigns by United Colors of Benetton or in a Times special issue proudly
presenting the new multicultural America using a morphed image of a racially
mixed young woman that perfectly fits the dominant ideal of female beauty
(242–243, 259–261). Fourth, liberal multiculturalism is accused of representing
cultures as static, ahistoric, and mutually exclusive entities, which does not do
justice to their actually dynamic and fluid character (Brah 1996). This essen-
tialist approach of diversity causes a fifth problem: it leaves unchallenged the
authority of traditional community leaders to define what is essential to the
preservation of their culture. As a consequence, it becomes difficult to question
the role traditionally ascribed to women within, for instance, fundamentalist
religious movements (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992, 193). Finally, the concep-
tion of the autonomous and rational subject underlying liberal defenses of mul-
ticulturalism does not offer an adequate representation of the often fragmented,
layered, and hybrid identities of the actual members of multicultural soci-
eties (Anzaldúa 1987).

Although feminists within both strands of multiculturalism share similar
concerns about the inherent sexism in traditional cultural and ethnic groups,
critical multiculturalists address them from a different perspective on politics
and power. Liberal thinkers, we could say, start from above. Their notion of
politics refers to the sphere of the (nation-)state and its institutions, and they
conceive of politics as a sphere of reasonable deliberation on how legitimate
state power can be used to improve the lives of citizens. Liberal multicultur-
lists attempt to find out which principles, laws, rules, and policies a good or just
government should follow to meet the needs and interests of minority groups.
Critical multiculturalists, on the other hand, start from below. They develop ideas about the role and strategy of oppositional movements in improving the lives of citizens. For them, politics is about the struggles for hegemony between the (ethnic and religious) majority and different minorities. They discuss ways marginalized groups may achieve empowerment, challenge dominant ideas and create counterhegemonic practices. The aim of critical multiculturalism is to break through the (supposedly) homogenizing tendency of the hegemonic way of thinking and make room for the history and heritage of minority groups. Political power is located not so much in the "official-political" sphere of government and governmental institutions but in the organization of everyday life as a "discursive political' realm" (Fraser 1989, 26). Rather than explore, as liberal multiculturalists do, the possibilities and limits for the equal recognition of other cultures, critical multiculturalists question whether and to what extent forms of (liberal) multiculturalism may actually worsen rather than improve the lives of individuals, situated as they are at the intersection of axes of social inequality such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality.9

Standpoints and Intersections
A line of feminist thought that made a significant contribution to the critical discourse on multiculturalism is developed by women of color and third-world women who take issue with the (Western) women's movement for its inherent racism and classism (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; Sandoval [1982]1990; Mohanty, Russo, and Torres 1991) (see also the chapter by Patricia Hill Collins and Valerie Chepp in this volume). Mainstream feminism, it is argued, has long mistaken the concerns of white women for those of women in general, thereby ignoring race, ethnicity, and class as axes of inequality. Some talk about a "double jeopardy" (Beale 1970) or even a "triple jeopardy" (Collins 1991), as women of color suffer not only from sexism but also from racism and poverty. To empower such marginalized women, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1986, 1991) develops the contours of what she calls a Black feminist standpoint. Many, however, find that such additive approaches are inadequate. In societies stratified by numerous axes of difference and equality, the lives of men and women are structured by multiple and interlocking systems of gender, race, class, and sexuality and hence are far more complex.

To grasp this complexity, Black legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) coined the concept of intersectionality. According to Crenshaw, women's identities are always lived in the modalities of other categories of identity, such that gender is always lived in the modalities of ethnicity and class, nationality in the modalities of gender and race, or class in the modalities of gender and nationality. The intersectional approach thus takes into account differences not only between but also within groups of women (1242).
However, by representing the social reality of intersecting axes of identity as "converging" systems of oppression (Crenshaw 1991, 1245), within these early conceptions of intersectionality women are still seen as passive bearers of the meanings of categories imposed upon them by a sexist, racist, patriarchal, or homophobic system. As such, they tend to fall back to the additive account they wished to leave behind. As in standpoint theory, the only conceivable strategy of resistance is to self-consciously reappropriate one's identity as, for instance, a Black woman or a working-class lesbian.

**Hegemonic Practices**

Some feminists find that identity politics is an unfortunate road to take as it is based on reified identity categories, collapses categories of personal and collective identity, takes political differences between women as mere "reflections of different stages of raised consciousness," and mistakenly believes that the basis for political action is a reality to be discovered and subsequently changed (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992, 191).

Inspired by the tradition of (British) cultural studies and (French) post-structuralist philosophy, these feminist scholars adopt alternative conceptions of power and politics as developed within the post-Marxist theory by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe ([1985]2002). In their plea for radical democracy Laclau and Mouffe adopt Antonio Gramsci's notion of power as hegemony, that is, the power of a bloc of parties that have entered into a temporary alliance. Hegemonic formations are the contingent and provisional outcome of political struggle; they always have to reckon with the existence of marginalized but potentially subversive counterhegemonic discourses. From a poststructuralist perspective, identities are always constructed in and through hegemonic discursive practices. Identity categories therefore not only limit women's freedom of movement and choice but also provide narrative and enabling resources for resisting these categorizations. So critical multiculturalists question and deconstruct the detrimental effects of what Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994, 17) call "transnational scattered hegemonies" and also look for sites where new figurations of the (female feminist) subject are created and transformative forms of politics are practiced.\(^{10}\)

**New Figurations of Subjectivity**

One of the central aims of critical multiculturalists is to radically interrogate the modernist and humanist notions of subjectivity and identity upon which the liberal discourse of multiculturalism is built. The ensuing challenge is to develop "analytical frames capable of addressing multiple, intersecting, axes of differentiation" (Brah 1996, 210). Such analytical frames need to be radically antiesentialist and should include marginalized discourses and forms of subjectivity and ways of thinking while simultaneously avoiding their assimilation within
the hegemonic discourse. Stam and Shohat (1994), therefore, speak of polycen-
tric multiculturalism as a project that consistently "thinks and imagines 'from
the margins'" and grants epistemic advantage to those who are equipped with
a "double consciousness" (300). The subject is to be seen as "a site of multiple
voicings" not originating from one unitary and self-transparent subject but as
constituted by "a discourse that traverse[s] consciousness" (Alarcón 1990, cited
in Brah and Phoenix 2004, 78). One example is Gloria Anzaldúa's exploration of
the figure of the new mestiza who as a "a product of crossbreeding" (Anzaldúa
1987, 81) provides "hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich
gene pool" (77). Rather than celebrating diversity as something smooth and easy,
the mestiza experience is one of living racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity
"in the flesh." To cope with her body and soul being the site of a constant "clash
of cultures" (81), the mestiza develops a considerable tolerance for ambiguity and
ambivalence (79). Other examples of such alternatives to the modernist notion
of the autonomous and rational subject are Trinh's (1989) inappropriate/d other,

By these new figurations critical feminist multiculturalists attempt to indi-
cate how diversity and difference destabilize our notion of the (female feminist)
subject. However, this radical decentering of the subject raises the question as
to the origins of critique and resistance. If "there is no doer behind the deed,"
as Judith Butler (1990, 142) approvingly quotes Friedrich Nietzsche's disman-
tling of the illusions of autonomy and rationality, how can we then conceive of
creative resistance or innovative action? Where does real change come from if
the subject is no longer an autonomous source of speech and action but is sim-
ply a node in a discursive field of (counter)hegemonic forces? The difficulty to
address such questions becomes particularly acute when the position of women
within (fundamentalist) Islam appears on the agenda of Western feminism.

**Transversal Politics**

In an ethnographic study of a Muslim women's mosque movement in Cairo in
the 1990s, Saba Mahmood (2005) shows how these pious women wholeheartedly
subject themselves to the demands of Islam. Admittedly, they do not meet the
liberal feminist criteria of autonomy, but according to Mahmood they neverthe-
less are active agents. Building on Butler's (1990) notion of the performativity of
gender, Mahmood argues that their agency consists in their deliberate engage-
ment in practices of self-cultivation through the performance of "repeated bodily
acts" by which they train their "memory, desire and intellect to behave according
to established standards of conduct" (214). The problem with this analysis is that
it meets the feminist demand to respect the choice of women who self-consciously
opt for a nonliberal lifestyle but that it leaves precious little room for question-
ing the misogynist assumptions underlying these established standards of conduct.

In the wake of the Salman Rushdie affair of 1989, British sociologist Nira
Yuval-Davis (1992, 285) observed that as "carriers" of religious norms and values,
Muslim women especially are expected to contribute not only to the biological but also to the cultural reproduction of their collectivity. As a consequence, they are the object of strong social control within their community. British policies of multiculturalism were at least partly responsible for the significant growth of fundamentalist movements in the United Kingdom that imposed uniformity on their members (283). From the perspective of critical multiculturalism, Yuval-Davis’s critique was problematic, as it could feed into already existing racist and xenophobic sentiments toward Muslims in the United Kingdom and seems disrespectful of the autonomy of this religious minority group. Yet, against the grain, in the early 1990s there emerged an organization in London, Women Against Fundamentalism (WAF), that did question the role of women within Islamic fundamentalism without relapsing into a position of cultural imperialism. According to Yuval-Davis, WAF succeeded in finding an effective voice amid the minefield of politically correct standpoints during the Rushdie affair, because the movement practiced a form of transversal politics. Transversal politics, a term adopted from Italian feminists who worked with members of conflicting national groups (Yuval-Davis 1994), consists of the formation of coalitions of individuals from various backgrounds who organize on the basis of a common stance regarding a specific issue. This common stance is based on dialogues in which each participant brings in her own experiences and identity (i.e., rooting) while simultaneously attempting to put herself in a situation of exchange with other members of the coalition (i.e., shifting) without either centering herself or homogenizing the other (Yuval-Davis 1999, 123). All feminist (and other democratic) politics can thus be seen as a form of coalition politics whose boundaries are set “not in terms of ‘who’ we are but in terms of what we want to achieve” (Yuval-Davis 1997, 126). This poststructuralist interpretation of intersectionality neither is based on the (liberal) assumption of the feminist subject as autonomous and rational nor lapses into a relativistic position that renders each reference to hegemonic norms and values suspect.

WAF did not present itself as antitraditional or antireligious but forged a critical third position, aptly expressed in the slogan, “Our tradition—resistance, not submission!” (Yuval-Davis 1999, 114). In this respect, WAF shows a remarkable similarity with the strategy set out by the French feminist movement Ni putes, ni soumises (Neither whores, nor submissive) (Amara 2003) a couple of years later. Here too was a coalition of religious and secular women, who together challenged both the image upheld by fundamentalist Muslims of independent women as whores and the Islamophobic assumption that all Muslim women are oppressed.

Concrete Others and Interactive Universalism

An interesting middle ground between the discourses of liberal and critical multiculturalism is explored by Seyla Benhabib (2002). On one hand, Benhabib
agrees with critical multiculturalists in their rejection of the mosaic version of multiculturalism, that is, "the view that human groups and cultures are clearly delineated and identifiable entities that coexist while maintaining firm boundaries" (8). Instead, cultures should be seen as radically hybrid and polyvocal rather than coherent and pure wholes (25). But on the other hand, with liberal multiculturalists Benhabib is adamant that feminists should take the dimension of normative deliberation seriously (7). Her critical account of cultural diversity is therefore based on two pillars: a narrative conception of identity; and an interactive account of universalism.

According to the narrative model of identity, to become a self is to insert oneself into already existing webs of narratives. We cannot freely choose the webs of signification that we are caught in, yet we have the capacity "to weave out of those narratives...a life story that makes sense for us" (Benhabib 1999, 344). This account of identity thus leaves room for the multiplicity and fragmentation of individual subjects but simultaneously acknowledges the need for a core self. It leaves room for some form of autonomy, understood not as the feature of a dislocated and isolated subject but as the ability of people to sometimes critically distance themselves from their lives and actions.13

To take a critical distance, Benhabib (1999) claims, involves the capacity "to take a universalistic attitude of hypothetical questioning" (354, note 13). This universalistic attitude requires us to follow a procedure whereby we truly interact with others. For this purpose we should adopt the viewpoint not only of the generalized but also of the concrete other. For example, we should put ourselves in the position of others insofar as they are like us, such as beings with the same basic needs, equal rights and duties; however, we also should take account of their position insofar as they are truly other than us, such as beings with a different history, faith, and culture (Benhabib 1992). Benhabib's theory thus brings together the conception of politics as embraced by liberal thinkers as a sphere of reasonable deliberation on the legitimate use of state power to enhance the lives of citizens and the critical view that perceives of politics as the struggle to give voice to marginalized groups. In her view, policies regarding cultural, ethnic, and religious minorities should be based on normative guidelines that emerge when we follow the truly democratic procedures of interactive universalism.

**CONCLUSION**

As we have argued, liberal and critical multiculturalism started with radically opposed conceptions of individual autonomy and different positions regarding universalism and relativism. Liberalism has long held that human rights are
universal and conceives of autonomy as an innate capacity that (adult) persons all possess by virtue of their humanity. This makes the autonomous individual a presocial category, which prevents us from asking under what cultural conditions this autonomy is constituted. Poststructuralism, from which critical multiculturalism takes its inspiration, radically decentered the subject as an historical invention or an effect of power. Since it is context that determines our identity, critical multiculturalists tend to take a relativistic outlook to questions of cultural diversity. By presenting the individual as a fully socially constituted category they likewise prevent questioning the conditions for autonomous agency. On both sides we saw attempts to amend these shortcomings by recognizing more fully (1) that we are both culturally constituted and autonomous persons and (2) that across different cultures we may share some basic ideas in our thinking about justice.

If we critically assess the feminist credentials of both approaches, it is clear that liberal multiculturalists have given more thought to the issue of government intervention on behalf of minority women. They make clear that cultural diversity and gender equality are not necessarily at odds. Policies against THP, so claim the democratic and the contextualist approaches in particular, should take into account the culturally shaped identities of minority women and be based on culturally sensitive judgment. But the exclusive focus of the liberal debate on culture and on inequalities within minority groups is unfortunate insofar as the continuation of THP often is, as the example of sex selective abortion illustrated, an effect of the interplay of both cultural and material interests. Critical multiculturalism, on the other hand, does a good job giving a voice to resistance movements in the margins but leaves us empty-handed in cases where women consent with traditional practices that we consider harmful to them. This is not so much because it is less normative than liberal multiculturalism but because its normativity has a different target, that is, the deconstruction and dismantling of hegemonic ideas and practices leading to a radical transformation of modern Western culture.

We think, however, that both liberal and critical multiculturalists still underestimate the severity and scope of the problem of THP. Their focus is on a limited amount of prototypical examples like female genital cutting or forced marriage, while other equally harmful practices go unrecognized. In many parts of Africa, for instance, women cook on wood that they collect and carry home piled up on their head. In rural South Africa this is "not just a result of the gender division of labour, but is, in itself, a key way of engendering life" (Mattinga 2010, 212). Collecting firewood leads to musculoskeletal injuries, while cooking on firewood leads to chronic respiratory infections (ibid.). Yet this method of firewood energy acquisition and use is neither classified as a THP nor recognized as a problem of sustainability or risky work conditions. Likewise, we believe that many Western practices should but are as yet not recognized as THP, for instance forms of plastic surgery such as cutting the labia or narrowing the vagina based on notions of female beauty and sexual
attractiveness generated by the rise of the so-called raunch culture (see Jeffreys 2005; Levy 2006).

In our view, Anne Phillips's contextual approach to liberal multiculturalism and Seyla Benhabib's deliberative understanding of critical multiculturalism offer the most promising starting points for critically addressing THP without rendering minority women as passive victims of their culture. Both Phillips's emphasis on the need for contextual understanding of liberal and cultural values and Benhabib's conception of taking account of not only the generalized but also the concrete other point to the never-ending feminist task to scrutinize situations, practices, and conditions that may be harmful to women but are as yet not recognized as such.

NOTES

1. Like Iris Marion Young (1990), Kymlicka argues for a broader notion of justice that does not merely focus on problems of (socioeconomic) distribution but also includes the issue of equal recognition of different identities and cultures. However, while Young's argument for a "politics of difference" starts from the political demands of new social movements such as the feminist and the gay movement, Kymlicka's concern is primarily with the recognition of national minority cultures.

2. It was Okin (1999) that attracted attention, but see for the fuller argument Okin (1998).

3. See Parekh (2000, particularly ch. 9) for a full account of his discussion of traditional harmful practices.

4. Okin (1998) was so widely discussed that it is impossible to list all the reactions. For interesting contributions to the feminist discussion, see also Benhabib (2001, ch. 4), Coene and Longman (2010), Sauer and Strasser (2008), and Volpp (2001).


6. The approach does not ask whether people have equal rights but whether they possess the capabilities to perform the activities that are definitive of a life that is truly human (Nussbaum 1999, 41-42).

7. On this, see also Saharso (2007).

8. SlavojŽižek (1997, 46) speaks of multiculturalism as "the cultural logic of multinational capitalism...the problematic of multiculturalism—the hybrid coexistence of diverse cultural life-worlds—...is the form of appearance of its opposite, of the massive presence of capitalism as universal world system: it bears witness to the unprecedented homogenization of the contemporary world" (see also Žižek 2001, 238-239).


10. In an overview of the methodological implications of the notion of intersectionality, Leslie McCall (2005) refers to early theories of intersectionality as the intracategorical
approach (which focuses on qualitative case studies into the position of one particular, marginalized category), while poststructuralist accounts of intersectionality start from an antiscatological perspective (which point out the exclusionary effects of categorization and further deconstruct of existing categories of identity). To these two approaches McCall's adds (and promotes) a third approach: the intercategorical perspective, which strategically uses existing categories in large-scale quantitative multigroup and comparative studies to "analyze the intersection of the full set of dimensions of multiple categories" (1787). For a more in-depth discussion of early and poststructuralist theories of intersectionality, see also Prins (2006).

11. *Mestiza* is the Spanish word for a woman of mixed racial ancestry. Anzaldúa speaks specifically of the identity of Chicana women as a mix of white, Mexican, and indigenous cultures.

12. In 1989, the Iranian ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa on the British-Indian author Salman Rushdie for his blasphemous portrayal of the prophet Muhammad in his novel *The Satanic Verses*. This led to many violent protests against Rushdie in the Muslim world and to the murder of several translators and publishers of his book; Rushdie went into hiding for years on end. The affair triggered vehement discussions, especially in Great Britain, forcing intellectuals to rethink their hitherto quite tolerant attitude toward Islam and to consider the scope of and relation between fundamental human rights, such as the rights to free speech and self-expression, and the freedom of religion.

13. It shows similarities with Donna Haraway's poststructuralist conception of feminist politics as a politics of "cyborgs" that consists of temporary alliances based not on shared identities but on "affinity," the appeal of one chemical nuclear group for another, the debt" (Haraway 1991, 155).

14. What Benhabib (1999) finds missing in poststructuralist accounts of the subject is the notion of intentionality. She agrees with Judith Butler (1990) that linguistic agency can be seen as the possibility to reiterate and thereby sometimes transform existing conventions and norms. But while Butler sees this as part of the subversive potential of language itself, Benhabib thinks that such processes of resignification can take place only through language in use, in other words through communication. And when people communicate, they utter a statement with the intention to raise a claim to truth, rightness, or sincerity. Hence, to make sense of linguistic utterances, we need to postulate that there indeed is "a doer behind the deed" (Benhabib 1999).

References


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