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The Essentialist Critique of Multiculturalism:
Theories, Policies, Ethos

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Global Governance Programme

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Abstract

One important critique of multiculturalism is that it promotes "essentialism", reifying the identities and practices of minority groups. In Anne Phillips' words, multiculturalism "exaggerates the internal unity of cultures, solidifies differences that are currently more fluid, and makes people from other cultures seem more exotic and distinct than they really are". Multiculturalism has therefore become a "cultural straitjacket" rather than a "cultural liberator", and requires "radical overhaul" if it is to serve emancipatory goals. In this paper I challenge this claim. The phenomenon of essentialism surely exists, but is multiculturalism really to blame? I argue that the essentialist critique conflates different issues, jumping from critiques of academic theories of multiculturalism to critiques of government policies to critiques of everyday street-level discourses of ethnic difference. Once we distinguish these different targets, the essentialist critique is less damning to multiculturalism than initially supposed. Indeed, we may find that the theories and practices of liberal multiculturalism, far from being the cause of the problem of essentialism, are a remedy to them.

Keywords

Since the late 1960s, in response to increasing restiveness and mobilization on the part of minority groups, a number of Western democracies have engaged in new experiments in the recognition and accommodation of ethnic diversity. These experiments include:

- recognizing land rights and self-government rights for indigenous peoples;
- strengthening regional autonomy and official language status for substate national groups;
- adopting more accommodationist policies for immigrant groups.[1]

I will describe all of these as experiments in 'liberal multiculturalism'.

While these experiments started to emerge 40 years ago, it took a while for political theorists to turn their attention to these developments. It was only in the early 1990s, twenty years later, that we started to get the first scholarly discussions by academic political philosophers aiming to articulate normative theories of multiculturalism, and to explore how these emerging practices relate to liberal-democratic values and principles.

Both the policies and the theories have come under sustained attack in recent years, and multiculturalism is widely viewed as in retreat across the Western democracies. To oversimplify, we can place the critics into two broad camps: the "anti-multiculturalists" and the "post-multiculturalists".[2] Anti-multiculturalists, such as Brian Barry (2001) and Samuel Huntington (2004), say that multiculturalist ideas are inherently illiberal – ie., that multiculturalism is based on a repudiation of Enlightenment values of individual freedom, democratic citizenship and universal human rights, and it is precisely this repudiation of core Enlightenment principles which explains why multiculturalists seek to challenge traditional Western models of national citizenship in the name of cultural difference. The post-multiculturalists, by contrast, accept that multiculturalism is rooted in familiar liberal-democratic ideals of equality, freedom and citizenship, and indeed aims precisely to address the many ways in which full equality and citizenship are denied to minorities. They worry, however, that multiculturalist reforms have either failed to solve the problems for which it was intended or inadvertently created new ones. In Anne Phillips' words, despite its noble intentions, multiculturalism has become a "cultural straitjacket" rather than a "cultural liberator", and it requires "radical overhaul" if it is to serve its original emancipatory goals (Phillips 2007: 16).

In this chapter, I will focus on the post-multiculturalist critique. I have argued elsewhere that the anti-multiculturalists are demonstrably mistaken about the origins and motivations of the rise of multiculturalism in the past four decades. The rise of multiculturalism in the West, far from repudiating liberal-democratic values, has been part and parcel of a broader rights revolution that is intimately linked to processes of liberalization and democratization (Kymlicka 2007). But the post-multiculturalist critique cannot be so easily dismissed. After all, it is not uncommon for public policies to have unintended, even counterproductive, effects, and there's no reason to assume that multiculturalism is immune to this risk. Moreover, despite forty years of experiments in liberal multiculturalism it is clear that minorities continue to face many forms of exclusion and stigmatization, some of which may indeed be getting worse. So we need to take seriously the possibility that multiculturalism has become part of the problem, rather than part of the solution, and that it needs overhauling.

I am particularly interested in the role that academic political theories of multiculturalism are said to play in the post-multiculturalist literature. As we will see, post-multiculturalists do not typically say that multiculturalism is "good in theory but bad in practice". On the contrary, they often insist that the flaws of multiculturalism in practice are reflected in, and perhaps even attributable to, flaws in the way

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[1] Keith Banting and I have attempted to measure the spread of these policies across the Western democracies in our "Multiculturalism Policy Index", available at: www.queensu.ca/mcp

[2] For this contrast, see Vertovec 2005; Ley 2005.

political theorists have conceptualized multiculturalism. A few even suggest that multiculturalism has been better in practice than in theory, and that the situation would have been even worse if academic theories of multiculturalism had been implemented more faithfully.

So political theories of multiculturalism have served as an important target in the post-multiculturalism literature. The theories are said to be defective, and these theoretical defects are said to be at least partly responsible for the failings of multiculturalism in practice. I want to challenge this picture. My concern is not primarily to defend theories of multiculturalism, although I do think they have often been misinterpreted. My concern, rather, is with the cavalier way post-multiculturalists link theory and practice. I will argue that much of the post-multiculturalist critique conflates different potential targets, jumping from critiques of academic theories of liberal multiculturalism to critiques of government policies of multiculturalism to critiques of everyday street-level discourses or enactments of ethnic difference. I will argue that we need to more carefully distinguish these different targets, and that once we do, we will find that the criticisms are less damning to liberal multiculturalism than initially supposed. Indeed, we may find that the theories and practices of liberal multiculturalism, far from being the cause of the problem, are still the best remedy to them. But in any event, we can't make progress on this issue without being more cautious and reflective about the relationship between theories and practices.

To develop this point, I will focus on the issue of "essentialism", which is one of the most important themes in the post-multiculturalist literature. According to critics, liberal multiculturalism involves essentializing the identities and practices of minority groups. To quote Phillips, multiculturalism

> exaggerates the internal unity of cultures, solidifies differences that are currently more fluid, and makes people from other cultures seem more exotic and distinct than they really are. Multiculturalism then appears not as a cultural liberator but as a cultural straitjacket, forcing those described as members of a minority cultural group into a regime of authenticity, denying them the chance to cross cultural borders, borrow cultural influences, define and redefine themselves. (Phillips 2007: 14)

This is a widespread concern amongst the post-multiculturalists – I will cite several similar statements from Anthony Appiah, Seyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser and Samuel Scheffler below - even amongst those (like Phillips herself) who have earlier expressed sympathy for multiculturalism.

In one sense, this charge is puzzling. After all, one of the central planks in many defences of multiculturalism is precisely the complaint that national identities have all too often been essentialized in ways that exclude minorities. Opening up space for multiculturalism has typically required challenging these essentialist conceptions of nationhood. We can see this clearly in Parekh's work on nationalism and national identity, where a defense of multiculturalism has been predicated upon a critique of essentialism (eg., Parekh 1995, 1998). It seems implausible that multiculturalist theorists would begin by attacking essentialist conceptions of national identity and culture and then turn around and adopt essentialist conceptions of minority identity and culture.

But that is indeed what critics argue, and we cannot simply dismiss the objection. No one can seriously doubt that the problem of essentialization exists, or that members of minority groups often feel they are confined by cultural straitjackets. What it is less clear, I will argue, is the role that multiculturalism plays in this phenomenon. When critics blame multiculturalism for causing or exacerbating essentialism, they typically conflate political theories, government policies and social practices in a way that makes it difficult to diagnose the real source of the problem, and impossible to identify appropriate remedies. Or so I will argue.

I will start by explaining what I mean by liberal multiculturalism, and how it operates in both theory and practice. I will then consider the essentialist critique, and explore how it relates theory and practice, before concluding with some reflections on the implications of this analysis for ongoing debates.

1. Liberal Multiculturalism: An Overview

Much of my work over the past twenty years has been motivated by the hope and belief that there is such a thing as a distinctly *liberal* multiculturalism (hereafter LMC). So I should start by clarifying what I mean by `liberal multiculturalism', and the different senses in which I think it is worth defending.

Both halves of that compound term are important. On the one hand, LMC is a distinctly <u>liberal-democratic</u> form of multiculturalism, grounded in core liberal values of freedom, equality and democracy, and to be evaluated for its effects on these values. It therefore differs from non-liberal or illiberal forms of multiculturalism, of which there are many historic examples, in which groups agree to terms of peaceful co-existence while remaining indifferent to the freedoms or democratic rights of individuals.

On the other hand, LMC is a distinctly <u>multicultural</u> form of liberal democracy, going beyond the familiar list of basic liberties contained in all liberal-democratic theories and constitutions to also include policies that recognize and accommodate ethnocultural minorities. Many features of a liberal democracy provide important protections to ethnocultural minorities – particularly guarantees of non-discrimination and guarantees of individual civil liberties (freedom of speech, association, religion etc). But a multicultural liberalism differs from other forms of liberal democracy by going beyond these generic guarantees to also adopt group-differentiated laws and policies that recognize and accommodate various types of diversity, including the three patterns I mentioned earlier: (i) indigenous land rights and self-government; (ii) regional autonomy and official language rights for national minorities; and (iii) accommodation rights for immigrant groups.[3]

I have tried to defend LMC at three different levels:

Philosophical: I believe that if we start from the core premises of liberal political philosophy, as articulated by say Mill or Rawls, including their accounts of autonomy and justice, we can show that there is no logical or conceptual inconsistency in also endorsing various multicultural laws and policies. Indeed, we can construct arguments in which LMC enhances, strengthens or deepens these liberal premises – eg., it enhances the ability of individuals to exercise Rawls's `two moral powers', by securing one or more of the conditions needed for personal and political autonomy; and/or enhances society's compliance with Rawls' difference principle, by diminishing one or more forms of arbitrary disadvantage in life-chances. In particular, I have suggested that a liberal concern for autonomy requires a concern for people's cultural "context of choice", and that this can generate a liberal argument for the adoption of minority rights that enable substate national groups to sustain their "societal cultures", and that enable immigrant groups to have their identities fairly accommodated (Kymlicka 1995).[4]

Policy Goal: This philosophical argument, if valid, shows that LMC is a theoretical possibility – ie., one could imagine a hypothetical ideal world containing a version of multiculturalism that fits comfortably with liberal-democratic values. Some people might accept that, but insist that this has no connection to the actually-existing forms of multiculturalism, which are grounded in different sorts of

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[3] For a more comprehensive account of the group-differentiated policies related to these three types of diversity, see the Multiculturalism Policy Index (note 1), which distinguishes nine characteristic multiculturalism policies for indigenous peoples; six characteristic policies adopted in relation to national minorities; and eight such policies in relation to immigrant groups.

[4] In this way, I try to defend liberal-democratic multiculturalism by appeal to distinctly liberal conceptions of autonomy and justice. Parekh, by contrast, tries to defend liberal-democratic multiculturalism while avoiding appeal to distinctly liberal values, arguing that the merit of these liberal values should itself be open for contestation in an inter-cultural dialogue (Parekh 2000). I cannot pursue the issue here, but I believe that such "dialogical" defenses of liberal-democratic multiculturalism typically smuggle in distinctly liberal values (see my review of Parekh in Kymlicka 2001). In any event, the essentialist critique applies to both approaches.

values that conflict with liberal-democracy. Real-world multiculturalism, on this view, is grounded in decidedly illiberal views, and indeed is best understood as being inherently "anti-universalistic in their thrust" (Barry 2001: 5), "in its essence anti-European" (Huntington 2004: 171) or even a "war against the West" (Kristol 1991: 15).

I have argued, however, that LMC is not just a theoretical possibility. Rather, it exists as a real-world practice. Indeed, most of the real-world experiments in recognition and accommodation adopted in the Western democracies over the past 40 years have been inspired by a belief that they contribute to processes of liberalization and democratization.[5] These policies have been framed to fit with liberal-democratic values, and their principles have been interpreted (eg., by bureaucrats and courts) to preserve that fit.

More specifically, multiculturalism can be seen as part of a larger "human rights revolution" in relation to ethnic and racial diversity. Prior to World War II, ethnocultural and religious diversity in the West was characterized by a range of illiberal and undemocratic relations – including relations of conqueror and conquered; colonizer and colonized; master and slave; settler and indigenous; racialized and unmarked; normalized and deviant; orthodox and heretic; civilized and primitive; ally and enemy. These relationships of hierarchy were justified by racialist ideologies that explicitly propounded the superiority of some peoples and cultures, and their right to rule over others. These ideologies were widely accepted throughout the Western world, and underpinned both domestic laws (eg., racially-biased immigration and citizenship policies) and foreign policies (eg., in relation to overseas colonies). After WWII, however, the world recoiled against Hitler's fanatical and murderous use of such ideologies, and the UN decisively repudiated them in favour of a new ideology of the equality of races and peoples. And this new assumption of human equality has generated a series of political movements designed to contest the lingering presence or enduring effects of older hierarchies. We can distinguish three "waves" of such movements: (a) the struggle for decolonization, concentrated in the period 1948 to 1965; (b) the struggle against racial segregation and discrimination, initiated and exemplified by the African-American civil rights movement from 1955 to 1965; and (c) the struggle for multiculturalism and minority rights, which has emerged from the late 1960s.

Each of these movements draws upon the human rights revolution, and its foundational ideology of the equality of races and peoples, to challenge the legacies of earlier ethnic and racial hierarchies. Indeed, the human rights revolution plays a double role here: not just as the inspiration for struggle, but also as a constraint on the permissible goals and means of that struggle. Insofar as historically excluded groups struggle against earlier hierarchies in the name of equality, they too have to renounce their own traditions of exclusion or oppression in the treatment of women, gays, people of mixed race, religious dissenters, and so on. The framework of human rights, and of liberal-democratic constitutionalism more generally, provides the overarching framework within which these struggles are addressed. We cannot understand the rise of LMC in the West – we cannot understand when, where and why these experiments arose, or how they have been formulated - except as part of this larger human rights revolution (Kymlicka 2007).

Outcomes: One could accept this claim about the liberal inspiration for multicultural experiments, and yet still think that they have failed in practice. Policies often have perverse effects, and so LMC may have operated in practice to reduce autonomy, limit democratic participation, and/or exacerbate inequalities. As Koopmans puts it, while there are "legitimate normative reasons" for multiculturalism, "we cannot simply assume that what is normatively justifiable will also be practically efficient" (Koopmans 2006: 5), and indeed he argues that it has been counter-productive.

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[5] The motivations for adopting laws and policies are complex, including the desire to win ethnic votes, or amoral bargaining amongst self-interested groups. But the policies adopted for these complex reasons are framed to fit with liberal-democratic values.

Yet here again I want to argue that LMC has often worked to enhance liberal-democratic values. The evidence on outcomes is not easy to locate: very few multiculturalism policies have been systematically studied. As Reitz puts it, while academic discussions of multiculturalism have been extensive, "there is no real evaluation. The information base for such an evaluation is simply not there" (Reitz 2009: 13).

So any conclusions in this field will need to be tentative. Yet insofar as we have preliminary evidence, it suggests that most real-world experiments in liberal multiculturalism within the Western democracies have had beneficial effects on liberal values. Let me briefly review the three main cases:

- *Substate national groups*: the evidence is perhaps clearest in relation to substate national groups, where the shift to regional autonomy and (where relevant) official language status has enhanced the economic, political and social equality of national minorities, and done so in ways that fully protect individual civil and political rights. Indeed, in many cases, these substate national societies have used their autonomy to adopt more liberal policies than in the larger society. So this particular form of liberal multiculturalism is broadly uncontested in the scholarly literature: it is difficult to find anyone who thinks, for example, that it was a mistake for Spain to federalize to accommodate Catalan and Basque nationalism, or that Canada, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Finland or the UK should revoke their existing systems of autonomy or bilingualism.

- *Indigenous peoples*: the evidence regarding indigenous peoples is less clear, since they continue to be the most disadvantaged members of society, and so the adoption of liberal multiculturalist models has clearly not been "successful" in the usual sense of that term. Yet if we compare indigenous peoples across the Western democracies, or indeed within individual countries, those with stronger self-government rights are doing better than those without. And here again there is a broad consensus in support of this approach amongst scholars and international organizations, reflected in the virtually unanimous adoption of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007.[6]

- *Immigrant groups*: The most contested case concerns immigrant groups, where there is both greater political contestation and scholarly disagreement about the effects of multiculturalism policies. While many scholars celebrate the benefits of multiculturalism in this or that country, an equal number of scholars have declared it to be a failure. For example, in an influential recent book, Paul Sniderman and Luuk Hagendoorn (2007) blame multiculturalism for the high levels of ethnic stereotyping between native Dutch and Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands. But of course ethnic stereotyping is a pervasive problem throughout history and around the world, whether or not multiculturalism policies exist, and they provide no evidence that this stereotyping became worse in the Netherlands after the adoption of multiculturalism than before; or that it is worse in the Netherlands than in countries that haven't adopt multiculturalism. In short, they make no effort to identify the *differential effect* that multiculturalism has on pre-existing dynamics of stereotyping. This is typical of work in the field, which generally lacks either longitudinal or comparative data needed to determine the differential effect of adopting multiculturalism. However, if we look at those few studies that do have a comparative or longitudinal dimension, and hence that attempt to isolate the differential effect of having multiculturalism policies, they generally suggest that multiculturalism has been beneficial in terms of political participation (Bloemraad 2007; Adams 2007), trust and social capital (Kesler and Bloemraad 2010; Harrell 2009; Kazemipur 2009), prejudice (Weldon 2006), solidarity (Banting and Kymlicka 2006; Crepaz 2006), and psychological well-being (Berry et al 2006).[7]

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[6]   I discuss the evidence regarding national minorities and indigenous peoples in Kymlicka 2007: chap. 5.

[7]   I discuss these studies in more depth in Kymlicka 2010, 2011. The main exception to this generalization is the work of Ruud Koopmans (2006, 2010; Ersanilli and Koopmans 2011), who argues that multiculturalism is responsible for some of the poorer outcomes of immigrants in the Netherlands as compared to neighbouring countries without multiculturalism policies. For doubts about his analysis of the Dutch case, see Duyvendak and Scholten 2011. Even if his analysis holds

I emphasize again the limits of this evidence: it would be premature to claim that we have conclusive evidence of the merits of LMC. But it would be even more premature to claim we have evidence for its failure. There is a tendency in some quarters to dismiss LMC as an intellectual fad or fashion. But as we've seen, there were practices of LMC twenty years before there were academic theorists of multiculturalism, and the best explanation for the emergence of these practices across a wide range of Western democracies starting in the 1960s is that they were part of a larger human rights revolution aimed at addressing the lingering effects of inherited racial and ethnic hierarchies, and thereby contributing to processes of liberalization and democratization. And while these hopes may have been naïve or misguided, there is no evidence I can see that these experiments have generally or systematically eroded liberal democratic values. On the contrary, there is some provisional evidence for their beneficial effects.

And yet it is equally obvious that any such benefits are very uneven across different countries and different minorities. Western societies remain scarred by ethnic and racial hierarchies, by feelings of distrust across ethnic and religious lines, and by anxieties about the future direction of these relationships. Even if on average these policies have had beneficial rather than pernicious effects, they clearly have not achieved the highest hopes of their defenders, and in at least a few high-profile cases, they seem not to have worked at all. Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that there are some situations where they <u>cannot</u> work. Successful models of LMC have preconditions that are not always present, particularly outside the context of consolidated democracies, and efforts by international organizations to diffuse models of liberal multiculturalism have had very mixed and uneven results (Kymlicka 2007).

A central task is to try to explain the deeply uneven nature of multiculturalism's effects, to look honestly at the failures and limitations, as well as the successes. In this respect, the current wave of sober second thoughts about multiculturalism, represented in particular by the growing post-multiculturalist literature, is welcome and necessary. But as we will see, the usefulness of this post-multiculturalist critique is compromised by a persistent tendency to conflate different levels of analysis, and to move inconsistently between theory and practice.

2. The Post-Multiculturalist Critique of Essentialism

According to the post-multiculturalist critique, the emancipatory impulse underlying multiculturalism is being subverted by the "essentialist" way that cultures or identities are understood. Let me quote a few characteristic examples of this concern:

- Nancy Fraser: "[By] enjoining the elaboration and display of authentic, self-affirming and self-generated collective identities, it [the identity model] puts moral pressure on individual members to conform to group culture. The result is often to 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 2001: 24).

- Seyla Benhabib: Multiculturalism involves a 'reductive sociology of culture' that 'risks essentializing the idea of culture as the property of an ethnic group or race, it risks reifying cultures as separate entities by overemphasizinng the internal homogeneity of cultures in terms that potentially legitimise repressive demands for cultural conformity; and by treating cultures as badges of group identity, it tends to fetishize them in ways that put them beyond the reach of critical analysis'…. `The culture-based approach `yields illiberal consequences' including `acceptance of the need to `police' these [group] boundaries to regulate internal membership and `authentic' life forms' (Benhabib 2002: 4, 68)

(Contd.) ——————————

up, it remains an exception to a growing literature showing that multiculturalism policies have positive effects in cross-national and longitudinal studies.

- Jane Cowan: 'concerned with the ethical ambiguities of a discourse which may constrain, as much as enable, many of those it is meant to empower, by forcing their expressions of difference into a dichotomous interpretive frame that misrepresents their complex identities'… `This is the central ambiguity of a minority rights discourse; that it must deny ambiguity and fix difference in the realms of identity, or cultural practice, in defense of distinct cultures…even when meant to contest claims of national homogeneity, it locks us ever more tightly into precisely the same national logic of purity, authenticity and fixity' (Cowan 2001: 154, 171)

- Kwame Anthony Appiah: 'We know that acts of recognition, and the civil apparatus of such recognition, can sometimes ossify the identities that are their object ('if pursued with excessive zeal')… 'upholding differences among groups may entail imposing uniformity within them… Indeed, when multiculturalists like Kymlicka say that there are so many `cultures' in this or that country, what drops out of the picture is that every `culture' represents not only difference but the elimination of difference: the groups represents a clump of relative homogeneity, and that homogeneity is perpetuated and enforced by regulative mechanisms designed to marginalize and silence dissent from its basic norms and mores' (Appiah 2005: 110, 151-2)

- Samuel Scheffler: talk of multiculturalism 'provides an invitation to mischief both by encouraging us to think in sustainable strong-preservationist terms and by promoting a distorted and potentially oppressive conception of the relations between individuals and cultures' (Scheffler 2007: 124)

This is just a sample – one can find virtually identical statements in Patchen Markell, David Hollinger, Jurgen Habermas, Wendy Brown, and many others. And the general conclusion, shared by all, is that we need a "radical overhaul" of multiculturalism (Phillips 2007: 16).

What is striking about this list of authors is that it includes many people who have devoted their careers to exposing the false universalism or false neutrality underlying traditional republican or unitary models of difference-blind citizenship, and who therefore might be expected to be sympathetic to multiculturalism. These are not the anti-multiculturalists who are ideologically opposed to any particularist corruption of the purity or sanctity of republican citizenship. Nor are they conservatives who are nostalgic for the good old days of homogenous nationhood or unreflective patriotism. Rather, these are progressive theorists who take seriously the multiculturalist premise that traditional models of citizenship have been unjust and exclusionary, who support struggles for the emancipation of historically excluded groups, and who are committed to listening to their voices.

So, unlike anti-multiculturalists, these theorists are not out simply to score points against multiculturalism, or to ridicule or caricature it. In many ways their instincts are to sympathize with multiculturalist struggles. And yet they have all come to the conclusion that multiculturalism needs a radical overhaul, and in particular an overhaul of its essentialist tendencies.

If so many scholars who are committed to the inclusion and empowerment of minorities have come to this conclusion, then it must be true. But in what sense it is true? Or rather, in what contexts it is true? For example, when Scheffler says that multiculturalism "encourages" people to think in preservationist terms, or that it "promotes" an oppressive relationship between individuals and cultures, who or what is doing this encouraging and promoting, in what contexts? Is it philosophical theories of multiculturalism that are encouraging essentialism, perhaps because of the way they conceptualize culture and identity? Is it official public policies of multiculturalism that are encouraging essentialism, perhaps because of the way they define access to rights and entitlements? Or is it rather a more diffuse public ethos or discourse of multiculturalism that encourages essentialism, perhaps by reinforcing or legitimating pre-existing tendencies towards stereotyping?

In order to know how to radically overhaul liberal multiculturalism, we need to pin down the source of the problem. As it turns out, despite the apparent similarity in their phrasing, these writers have different targets in mind. Indeed, they actually give contradictory accounts of where the problem lies, in ways that generate different remedies. Once we distinguish these different targets and

remedies, what appears to be an overwhelming consensus on LMC's essentialist flaws starts to dissolve into a more disparate and disjointed series of largely unsupported speculations and assertions.

(a) Critiques of Multiculturalist Theories

In some cases, the target of the essentialist critique is philosophical theories of liberal multiculturalism. I will start with these, before moving to those who focus more on public policies or public ethos.

The two writers are most clearly target philosophical theories of multiculturalism are Benhabib and Appiah, who both have extended discussions of the ideas of culture and identity developed either in my work or that of Charles Taylor. Indeed the quotes listed above from Appiah and Benhabib follow directly on from their discussions of my account of `societal culture'. It is my concept of societal culture, Benhabib claims, that "potentially legitimises repressive demands for cultural conformity", that puts cultures "beyond the reach of critical analysis", and that entails "acceptance of the need to `police' [group] boundaries to regulate internal membership and `authentic' life forms". Similarly, Appiah argues that my concept of societal culture "may entail imposing uniformity" within groups, because "when multiculturalists like Kymlicka say that there are so many `cultures' in this or that country, what drops out of the picture is that every `culture' represents not only difference but the elimination of difference: the group represents a clump of relative homogeneity, and that homogeneity is perpetuated and enforced by regulative mechanisms designed to marginalize and silence dissent from its basic norms and mores' (Appiah 2005: 151-2).

Unsurprisingly, I think these are misinterpretations of my theory, but I don't want to go into that debate here. I do however need to say something about my idea of societal culture, not to defend it, but to help us sort out what follows from their critique of it. As they both note, my account of societal culture was intended to explain and evaluate the claims of substate national groups like the Quebecois to autonomy and official language rights. In my view, the case of Quebecois nationalism clearly exemplifies the goals of liberal multiculturalism, and I was looking for a way to make sense of this conceptually.

In the 1960s Quebec went through what is called the Quiet Revolution, which involved a double transformation. First, it involved a process of internal liberalization within French-Canadian society, particularly in the form of secularization, civil rights, and gender equality. This is one of the most dramatic examples of liberalization I know of, resulting in a society that is today the most liberal society in North America, more so than the rest of Canada or the United States (Grabb and Curtis 2010). Second, it involved a process of increasing nationalist mobilization in relation to the rest of Canada, fighting for greater minority rights, particularly self-government and language rights. The result of this nationalist mobilization has been a significant reduction in inequalities between anglophones and francophones in Canada, whether measured in terms of average incomes, government employment, or democratic participation.

Here is a paradigm case of liberal multiculturalism in action, resulting in greater *freedom within groups*, and greater *equality between groups*. And while we can see this analytically as two separate processes, it was seen by the actors involved as two sides of the same process – namely, building a more free, democratic and prosperous Quebecois nation. It wasn't as if there was one group of liberal elites fighting for liberalization, and another group of nationalist elites fighting for nationalism. It was the same elite involved in both struggles – an elite committed to liberal nationalism.

How are we to make theoretical sense of such a case? It is not explicable in the terms of traditional liberal theory, with its implicit assumptions about unitary and undifferentiated citizenship. We need new concepts to explain how minority rights can enhance liberal values. My suggestion was that self-government and language rights enabled the consolidation and prosperity of a francophone "societal culture" in Quebec. This societal culture provides a "context of choice" for its members – that is, it

provides the adequate range of options from which individuals are able to rationally and reflectively choose, as required by the liberal commitment to autonomy. Of course, this strategy of empowering Quebec to protect a francophone societal culture carries risks: these very same rights and powers could be used to suppress individual freedom in the name of upholding some vision of an "authentic" or "traditional" Quebecois culture. To avoid this risk, we need to understand these rights as "external protections" not "internal restrictions". That is, these rights are intended to diminish the extent to which members of a minority are vulnerable to the external decisions of the larger society, and are not intended to allow the minority to suppress the basic civil and political freedoms internally. This principle is reflected in the requirement that a minority's powers of self-government are constrained by the same constitutional requirement to respect human rights as all other levels of government. Since minority rights, on this view, are understood as external protections whose aim is to ensure the flourishing of a societal culture as a context of choice, they provide no justification for exemptions from or limitations on the basic liberties. Of course, once we rule out internal restrictions, this means that individual members will be free to question inherited beliefs and practices, and to adapt, revise or even reject them, as indeed happened during Quebec's Quiet Revolution, with its dramatic collapse of traditional (Catholic, patriarchal) ways of life. It is important, therefore, to distinguish the flourishing of a societal culture from changes to the "character" of that culture. Minority rights for the Quebecois ensured the former, but allowed dramatic change to the latter in response to the exercise of individual autonomy.

That was my way of trying to make theoretical sense of the Quebec case, using a handful of new concepts - "societal culture" as a context of choice, external protections vs internal restrictions, and so on. As I hope this makes clear, the whole point of the concept of societal culture was that it did <u>not</u> provide a justification for imposing "authentic life forms" (Benhabib) or for "marginalizing and silencing dissent" (Appiah). It was intended precisely to explain how it was possible for a minority society to seek minority rights while disavowing any desire to enforce traditional lifestyles, and instead to dramatically liberalize and transform itself through the exercise of individual autonomy.

So, predictably, I think that Benhabib and Appiah's interpretations are uncharitable. Both authors claim that my use of the term `societal culture' somehow legitimates denying individuals the right to rationally revise their inherited ways of life, but so far as I can tell, they simply assert rather than argue for this. However, I'm not a neutral observer in this debate, and others have found their critiques compelling. And in any event, that's not my main interest in this paper.

So let's assume they are indeed right, and that my concept of societal culture has these flaws. What implications does this have for the real-world practice of liberal multiculturalism? After all, they both insist that their anxiety is not just about essentialism within the halls of academic philosophy departments. They believe that essentialism is a problem with multiculturalism as a political project, which therefore needs a "radical overhaul". But what would this mean in cases of substate nationalism like Quebec? Recall that my concept of societal culture was developed to justify and explain claims for official language status and regional autonomy of such groups. Should we radically overhaul the way liberal-democratic states deal with such groups? Should we reject their claims to official language status and regional autonomy?

And here, things start to get murky. Benhabib and Appiah fudge their bets. Both immediately deny that they are necessarily opposed to the language and autonomy rights accorded to Quebec. As Appiah says about Quebec's language policy, "let me be clear that my target is not the particulars of the policy, but its rationale…I'm happy to put myself in the position of the proverbial philosopher who demands `that's all very well in practice, but will it work in theory'?" (Appiah 2005: 123, 101). The policy may work "very well in practice", but he thinks that talk about preserving societal cultures misidentifies why it can be a legitimate part of liberal-democratic practice. Similarly, Benhabib says that she "welcomes and supports" movements for "intercultural justice", including many struggles for regional autonomy, but she too thinks that they can be legitimate precisely because, and insofar as, they are <u>not</u> about preserving cultures (Benhabib 2002: ix, 65).

So both accept that this model of real-world liberal multiculturalism – regional autonomy and official language rights for substate national minorities – can work well in practice, and may not be in need of a radical overhaul, so long as they are not based on "culturalist premises" (Benhabib 2002: 65). So what, on their view, does provide the legitimating basis for struggles by substate national groups for autonomy and language rights?

In both cases, they respond that the basis for evaluating such movements should be "political" not "cultural". In Benhabib's words, "intercultural justice between human groups should be defended in the name of justice and freedom and not an elusive preservation of cultures". Struggles for recognition and identity/difference should be supported "to the degree to which they are movements for democratic inclusion, greater social and political justice, and cultural fluidity. But movements for maintaining the purity or distinctiveness of cultures seem to me to be irreconcilable with both democratic and more basic epistemological considerations". In short, movements of minority groups can be progressive "to the degree that they are motivated by other than conservationist impulses" (Benhabib 2002: ix). And so, in the particular case of Quebec or other movements for autonomy, she says: "If asked how to evaluate claim for regional autonomy, `I would say, Study their demands and their platform first!'". For example, we should ask how they propose to treat women, immigrants, democracy, foreign policy. And she insists that this `political' approach is very different from my argument which is "based on culturalist premises rather than political evaluations of movements and their goals" (Benhabib 2002: 65).

Similarly, Appiah says Quebec's language policy can be understood and justified not in terms of maintaining a francophone societal culture, but as "equality of citizenship in a francophone state" (Appiah 2004: 103). Quebecers have a democratic right to make French "the political language", and once they have done so, it is appropriate to ensure that all citizens have equal access to it. This citizenship-based argument, he says, is different from a right to maintain a francophone societal culture, since it operates within a framework of equal citizenship and individual autonomy not cultural preservation (Appiah 2004: 104).

I confess I have no idea how to understand this distinction between "political" and "culturalist". The whole point about the Quebec case, as I mentioned earlier, is that these two motivations were fused. Elites during the Quiet Revolution wanted to consolidate their societal culture (vis-à-vis the larger society) while simultaneously liberalizing and democratizing their society internally, improving its treatment of gays, women, immigrants, religious minorities and so on. These were two dimensions of the same underlying motivation – namely, to build a prosperous and democratic francophone society within Canada. They were committed to liberal-democratic values, but they were not indifferent to the scale or unit within which those values were operationalized. They wanted to implement those liberal-democratic values within the province of Quebec as an autonomous francophone society. And while they were strongly committed to nationalist values, they were not indifferent to the form that nationhood took: they wanted a liberal-democratic form of nationalism.

This is not unique to Quebec. It is a characteristic feature of substate nationalist movements across the Western democracies since the 1960s. They are simultaneously and intensely both "political" and "cultural". If it's to be useful, any normative political theory of (post)-multiculturalism has to say something about this combination. And yet, so far as I can tell, both Benhabib and Appiah fail in this task.

Indeed, their positions are full of ambiguities. On one interpretation, Benhabib and Appiah are saying that certain political criteria operate as a *constraint* on culturalist political projects. On this interpretation, struggles for minority rights are legitimate so long as human rights norms and individual civil rights are respected. Regional autonomies must, for example, comply with constitutional protections of individual rights, and with international human rights norms. If so, then of course I fully agree, and this simply restates an essential part of any liberal multiculturalist position (and of international norms of minority rights).

But their comments suggest a more radical interpretation, which is that movements for regional autonomy are illegitimate insofar as they have any "culturalist premises" or "conservationist impulses". These movements are illegitimate if ideas of maintaining cultural distinctiveness play any role in their motivations. On this view, it's not enough that minority groups comply with the constraints of liberal norms, they must be solely and exclusively motivated by these norms. They must, in short, be indifferent to the scale or unit of liberal-democracy, and have no intrinsic preference for exercising liberal-democracy in, say, a predominantly francophone Quebec rather than a predominantly anglophone Canada.

If this is their position, then it is truly radical. It would involve rejecting all real-world substate nationalist movements, since they clearly are not indifferent to the scale or societal/linguistic context within which liberal-democracy operates. It would therefore seem to entail abolishing autonomy for Catalonia, Quebec, Flanders, Puerto Rico, South Tyrol, all of which emerged from what, on this view, would be illegitimate political movements.

If this is indeed their view, then I think it is wholly implausible. It would involve rejecting what are almost-universally viewed as successful forms of accommodation, and would do so on the basis of a fetishistic dislike of `culturalist' motivations. It is also, I think, deeply hypocritical, since it's clear that majorities also operate on these culturalist motivations, and yet Appiah and Benhabib do not suggest that the majority's claims to self-government and language rights should be rejected. Members of dominant groups in England, Spain or Canada are not indifferent to the scale or linguistic context of liberal-democratic political life: they want to engage in liberal-democratic politics in contexts where they form a majority, and which use their language. Yet Appiah and Benhabib do not suggest that these states should lose their independence because of these culturalist premises. No one thinks that Denmark or the Czech Republic should give up their independence and join a larger German-speaking political unit, on the grounds that their commitment to national independence has "culturalist premises". So why should Catalonia or Quebec give up their pursuit of autonomy on the grounds that it involves culturalist premises?

In fact, both Appiah and Benhabib realize that this radical interpretation is untenable, and so back off it. Appiah, for example, says that while Quebec's language law is only permissible if it is motivated by equal citizenship values not cultural survival values, he then acknowledges that these two motivations are not really separable. He acknowledges that sustaining a francophone societal culture is aided by the choice of French as the "political language" for Quebec, and indeed he accepts that this is <u>why</u> that particular language was democratically chosen. Moreover, he says, "such an aim is a perfectly acceptable consideration in democratic politics", so long as it is pursued within a framework of equal citizenship and personal autonomy (Appiah 2004: 103-4). But now we're back to the more modest position that liberal-democratic norms constrain the pursuit of culturalist projects – a position that simply restates the liberal multiculturalism he claimed to be criticizing.

Similarly, Benhabib says that being motivated by cultural allegiances is after all perfectly legitimate, so long as "the goal of a public policy for the preservation of cultures must be the empowerment of the members of cultural groups to appropriate, enrich, and even subvert the terms of their own cultures as they may decide" (Benhabib 2002: 66-67). In short, culturalist projects are legitimate so long as they do not impose internal restrictions. But here again, this is simply a restatement of the liberal multiculturalism she claims to be critiquing. Benhabib claims that her account of "complex cultural dialogue" differs from mine in that it allows "democratic dissent, debate, contestation and challenge to be at the centre of practices through which cultures are appropriated". But any liberal conception of multiculturalism, including mine, affirms rights of democratic contestation and individual rational revisability. So far as I can tell, neither Benhabib nor Appiah provide any conceptual tools or political recommendations that go beyond what is already built into the theory and practice of liberal multiculturalism.

In any event, this is one version of the post-multiculturalist critique. It starts with the claim that academic theories of liberal multiculturalism contain essentialist premises, and while it is implied that these flaws have implications for real-world political practices, these implications are left indeterminate or ambiguous. Interpreted radically as rejecting any political claims that are even partly motivated by culturalist aspirations, it would require rejecting all real-world experiments in liberal multiculturalism, regardless of the evidence of their benefits from a liberal-democratic point of view. Interpreted more moderately as simply requiring that liberal-democratic constitutional norms be respected, it leaves all real-world practices of liberal multiculturalism untouched. Neither interpretation, it seems to me, adds to our understanding of the uneven successes and failures of liberal multiculturalism.

(b) Critiques of Multiculturalist Policies

Let me turn now to a second version of the post-multiculturalist critique, exemplified by Phillips' work.[8] Recall her central claim that multiculturalism

> exaggerates the internal unity of cultures, solidifies differences that are currently more fluid, and makes people from other cultures seem more exotic and distinct than they really are. Multiculturalism then appears not as a cultural liberator but as a cultural straitjacket, forcing those described as members of a minority cultural group into a regime of authenticity, denying them the chance to cross cultural borders, borrow cultural influences, define and redefine themselves (Phillips 2007: 14)

While this sounds similar to Benhabib and Appiah, she explicitly states that her target is not academic theories of liberal multiculturalism. Indeed, she says "it would be absurd" to blame theorists for these essentializing effects (23). She acknowledges that theorists of multiculturalism often have relatively sophisticated understandings of cultural activities and identifications, and it would be a case of "mistaken identity" (76) or even "polemical diatribe" (73) to accuse theorists of embracing these crude notions.

Her concern, rather, is with the <u>practice</u> of multiculturalism, and with the more simplified understandings of culture and identity that inform laws, policies and public discourses. For example, she says that "one of the biggest problems" with multiculturalism is "the selective way culture is employed to explain behaviour in non-Western societies or individuals from racialised minority groups, and the implied contrast with rational, autonomous (Western) individuals, whose actions are presumed to reflect moral judgements" (Phillips 2007: 9). Yet as she notes, this is not a problem with academic theories of liberal multiculturalism. They do not distinguish (non-Western) "culture" from (Western) "reason/judgement", but rather attempt to show how liberal autonomy itself has cultural preconditions. This problem of selectivity, then, arises at a different level, in the way multiculturalist ideas get translated into political practices.

So if Appiah says "that's all very well in practice, but will it work in theory?", Phillips' approach could be phrased as "that may work in theory, but will it work in practice?". This is a different target, and it requires different sorts of evidence, and also leads to different conclusions about the sort of "radical overhaul" that might be required.

So what does Phillips mean by the practice of liberal multiculturalism, and how do we judge whether it is having these essentializing effects, and how would we fix the problem? At first glance, it seems that her concern is with formal laws and policies. The book is essentially a review of a series of British cases in which public officials have had to deal with issues of immigrant diversity, including forced marriages, the cultural defense, dress-code exemptions, and so on. And so when she says that

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[8] Unlike most of the other authors being discussed, Phillips does not suggest abandoning the term `multiculturalism', and does not describe herself as a `post`-multiculturalist. However, as her book title <u>Multiculturalism without Culture</u> indicates, she seeks a post-culturalist multiculturalism, and this is relevantly similar to the other authors.

multiculturalism "appears as a cultural straitjacket …forcing those described as members of a minority cultural group into a regime of authenticity", it seems to be public officials, acting upon multiculturalist laws and policies, who are doing this exaggerating, forcing and denying.

And yet, as her book proceeds, it becomes clear that this is not in fact her target. On the contrary, she repeatedly observes that British public officials – whether educators, social service workers, police and judges – often have a fairly sophisticated understanding of the issues. For example, the courts have rejected the view of culture as a straitjacket (Phillips 2007: 112), and have dealt sensitively with the complexity of rights of exit (Phillips 2007: 144). This sensitivity is due in part to the fact that public officials typically receive training in handling these issues – training that is itself part and parcel of multiculturalism policies, and that explicitly disavows and warns against simplistic and essentializing ideas of culture.

And so, by the end of the book, her overall conclusion seems to be that the formal laws and bureaucratic regulations and procedures are more or less appropriate, and are not themselves in need of a radical overhaul. She says that on these basic policy questions "I reach much the same policy conclusions" as liberal multiculturalists (Phillips 2007: 113), and it's not clear in what ways, if any, she would change the current laws, regulations, jurisprudence, handbooks, codes of conduct etc that are used by public officials to address issues of multiculturalism.

So what then is the problem of essentialism, on her view? If the problem doesn't lie with academic theories of multiculturalism or with public policies, who or what is encouraging essentialism? If we dig deeper, it seems to me that her concern is with a more diffuse phenomenon, which she sometimes calls a "public discourse" or "public ethos" of multiculturalism. For example, she says that even if no formal law endorses or fosters an essentialist view, "a strongly multicultural public ethos is likely to have some of the suggested effects" (76). A multiculturalist "public discourse" or "public ethos", she fears, is likely to reproduce pre-existing stereotypes and prejudices, such as the assumption that non-Europeans act blindly from cultural compulsion whereas whites act from reason and moral judgement.

In short, the problem seems to be with the "the way we talk" about multiculturalism in public life, and it is this that needs a radical overhaul, not multiculturalist policies per se or academic multiculturalist theories. Her concern seems to be with the way multiculturalism is talked about in the media, in the associational life of civil society, or even amongst friends and families.

This is an interesting claim, but it requires unpacking. What exactly is a public ethos of multiculturalism, and how do we test whether or not it is having essentializing effects? Her book contains many examples of everyday public discourse which exhibits essentializing assumptions – a phenomenon well-captured in Gerd Baumann's famous study of street-level discourses on ethnic difference in Southall (Baumann 1996). But as Tariq Modood notes, it may be a mistake to read too much into these statements:

> a successful politics of difference-recognition may (or may not) be accompanied by crude, confused unreflective notions of culture, but for theorists to latch on to the reification in the confused or crude accounts that agents give of their activities and beliefs is actually to over-homogenize and essentialize the beliefs that people have…The charge of essentialism is itself essentialist. It rightly identifies some elements of essentialism in the political discourses of identity and culture but attributes a false importance to them. It gives them the status of being THE beliefs that constitute the understanding of culture, identity and so on in multiculturalism, when in fact multiculturalist discourses may be, indeed invariably are, based on a variety of beliefs and assertions about culture. (Modood 2007: 97-8)

So there are interesting complexities here about how to describe or measure the extent to which a 'public ethos' does or does not perpetuate essentialist assumptions.

However, for my purposes, the more pressing question is how we would we go about fixing the problem of an essentializing public ethos. Some commentators might think that the best way to change this public ethos is to reject formal policies of multiculturalism. But that is not Phillips' proposal.

There is no evidence that public policies are generating the essentializing tendencies in the public ethos. On the contrary, as I noted earlier, insofar as we have comparative data, it seems that the problem of ethnic stereotyping is lower in countries with multiculturalism policies (Weldon 2006). So it would be another case of `mistaken identity' to blame multicultural public policies for an essentializing public ethos.

Indeed, it may be that strengthening these policies is the best remedy. It may be that the best way for public authorities to combat an essentializing public ethos is to actively diffuse the more complex and sophisticated understandings about multiculturalism that are currently given to the public officials tasked to implement these policies. This indeed is more or less what Phillips proposes, such as new programs of community outreach and education. While she describes her book as a call for a `radical overhaul' of multiculturalism, these suggestions seem to me to be firmly within the family of liberal multiculturalism, as is it already exists in countries like Canada, Australia and indeed the UK. Her recommendations seem largely to be a call for strengthening these policies. In short, the answer to the essentializing risks of a `strongly multiculturalist public ethos' is not to abandon multiculturalist public policies, but to re-commit to them.

(c) Critiques of Multiculturalist Activists

Finally, let me turn to a third version of the post-multiculturalist critique, which is also in a sense about a `public ethos' of multiculturalism, but which locates the problem in a different place. A good example is Jane Cowan's work on the essentializing effects of the political mobilization for minority rights amongst the Macedonian minority in Greece. She shows how, in order to justify their claims for Macedonian language rights, ethnic activists are encouraging people of Macedonian origin to self-identify in public as "Macedonian", and not to identify themselves as "Greek". This has been an uphill battle, in part because for many decades anyone who self-identified in this way was discriminated against by Greek public officials. But it is also an uphill battle because many ethnic Macedonians have, over the years, come to identify with the Greek language, literature and culture, and indeed to take pride in it. Whereas ethnic activists promote a discourse in which "they" (the Greeks) have a long history of persecuting "us" (the Macedonians), most ethnic Macedonians themselves do not share this simple us vs them identity. In some contexts, they too feel Greek, and not just in the sense of being a citizen of the state of Greece, but also in the sense of participating in a Greek-language culture, even as they still retain a sense of Macedonian identity, and an attachment to their ancestral language. Whereas activists seek to impose a particular narrative or script in which one must choose between being Greek or Macedonian - a proud Macedonian is someone who resents and rejects what `they' the Greeks have done to `us' and our language – most ethnic Macedonians resent having to make this sort of choice amongst their multiple identities.

Cowan finds this minority activist discourse to be disturbing. Recall her central claim: she is

> concerned with the ethical ambiguities of a discourse which may constrain, as much as enable, many of those it is meant to empower, by forcing their expressions of difference into a dichotomous interpretive frame that misrepresents their complex identities … This is the central ambiguity of a minority rights discourse; that it must deny ambiguity and fix difference in the realms of identity, or cultural practice, in defense of distinct cultures…even when meant to contest claims of national homogeneity, it locks us ever more tightly into precisely the same national logic of purity, authenticity and fixity (Cowan 2001: 154, 171).

This is a compelling case study, and it is not unique to that particular country or minority. It echoes fears expressed by Fraser and Appiah about minority activist discourses in the United States. Fraser worries that minority scripts "put moral pressure on individual members to conform to group culture. The result is often to 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 2001: 24). Similarly, Appiah has famously argued that minority scripts

exaggerate group homogeneity, and seek to enforce this homogeneity "by regulative mechanisms designed to marginalize and silence dissent from its basic norms and mores" (Appiah 2004: 151-2).

This is a very important issue, but it is different from that in Phillips' work. Phillips' concern (as I've interpreted it) is primarily with how a `multiculturalist public ethos' can lead members of the dominant group to have essentialist views about minorities - that is, multiculturalism encourages members of the mainstream to treat members of minority groups as prisoners of their exotic cultures, thereby reinforcing their already-existing prejudices. Cowan, by contrast, is primarily concerned with how members of the minority group itself, particularly its self-appointed activist leaders, seek to impose a particular script on co-members. Her focus is on *intra-group* processes of essentialization, not *inter-group* essentialization.[9]

Processes of intra-group essentialization clearly exist. But what does this have to do with liberal multiculturalism? After all, we can find examples of self-appointed leaders of ethnic and religious groups trying to impose "purity, authenticity and fixity" on their members throughout history and around the world, long before the rise of multiculturalism. This is as old as the Bible – indeed, we might say it is an eternal feature of ethnic and religious life. There are always some people within any group who are telling other members that they need to return to a more original, authentic or pure form of their culture or creed (just as there are always revisers and reformers who are pushing for more open and pluralistic understandings of identity and culture). This is the stuff of great novels and literature around the world for centuries. It would be bizarre to imply that this phenomenon only emerged when liberal multiculturalism arose in the 1960s.

Indeed, it's particularly bizarre to blame multiculturalism for the essentializing discourses of minority activists in Greece, since Greece has no multiculturalism policy! It is one of the countries in Europe (along with France and Turkey) that has most resolutely opposed any ideology of multiculturalism. Indeed, we might say that this is precisely the problem: Greece has no legal principles or political culture of liberal multiculturalism, and hence has no established traditions within either the minority or majority for accepting ideas of multiple and complementary loyalties and identities. The Greek government has operated on the premise that ethnic identities are zero-sum and inherently antagonistic, and the minority activists simply replicate this assumption. The solution to this, one might argue, is precisely a good dose of liberal multiculturalism, both in terms of legislation and political culture. Indeed, this is one of the findings of cross-national research on multiculturalism I cited earlier. By ensuring respect and recognition for a minority's identity, multiculturalism policies facilitate minority members adopting dual and complementary identities that bridge to the larger society, thereby enabling better psychological well-being and educational outcomes (Berry et al 2006). Multiculturalism policies can help turn what were seen as zero-sum identities into multiple and complementary identities.

Cowan (sometimes) acknowledges that this tendency towards essentialization predates multiculturalism, but she nonetheless worries that multiculturalism might exacerbate it. Multiculturalism might, for example, empower activists to force this essentializing script on unwilling group members. This recalls Appiah's concern that the "civil apparatus" of group recognition can be used to "marginalize and silence dissent" within a group, or Fraser's concern that multiculturalism can be used to "impose a single drastically simplified group identity".

But does multiculturalism really allow activists to "force" or "impose" identities, or to "silence: dissent? How are we to interpret these dramatic claims of "forcing", "imposing", "suppressing", "policing", and "silencing"? If it is meant literally – ie., that multiculturalism policies would legally empower minority activists to "force" members to accept a simplified identity – then it is simply false. In the Macedonian case, minority activists have no legal power whatsoever to compel group members

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[9] While these authors differ in their primary focus, I should note that Phillips also expresses concern about intra-group essentialization, and Appiah/Cowan/Fraser express concerns about inter-group processes.

to identify as exclusively Macedonian, and nor would they somehow gain this power if Greece suddenly adopted stronger minority language rights. On the contrary, the right of individuals not to be forced to declare a minority identity is a fundamental principle of both European and international human rights law, which is precisely the law that minority activists are appealing to. It is no part of their agenda – and no part of any possible multiculturalist outcome – that they would gain the power to legally compel people of Macedonian origin to adopt or declare a Macedonian identity.

Of course, one could imagine scenarios in which minority activists would use non-legal coercion or intimidation to force individuals to accept their script. Activists might threaten to assault people, or to burn down their houses, if they do not declare an exclusive Macedonian identity. This surely happens in many cases around the world. But this is not what Cowan has in mind. She gives no evidence that activists use extra-legal coercion against group members. As she tells the story, activists operate fully within the law. Similarly Appiah and Fraser are not recounting acts of physical threat or intimidation by minority activists.

So in what sense then do minority activists "impose" or "force" their script on unwilling members? To my mind, this is the crucial question for any liberal-democratic theory, yet it is sidestepped by all of these authors. After all, it is a foundational right within any democratic society that people can freely state their opinion that (for example) a proud Macedonian should speak Macedonian wherever possible, and should resist the corrupting influences of Greek culture. In a democratic society, people must be free to state this sort of opinion, and to seek to persuade others of it.

In principle, one could imagine attempting to forbid anyone expressing this sort of opinion, but this could only be done by violating fundamental civil liberties. Surely no one thinks that Jewish activists should be prohibited from saying that a good Jew will marry within the faith and avoid the corrupting influences of Christian culture (eg., celebrating Christmas), even if this reproduces (in Cowan's words) a dichotomous "logic of purity, authenticity and fixity".

So far as I know, no post-multiculturalist would endorse the radical solution of banning speech that involves this sort of essentialist logic. But what then exactly is the problem, and how do we fix it? What is the nature of this "forcing" and "imposing" an identity on someone, and how do we distinguish it from, say, "democratically persuading" someone to adopt an identity? Fraser says that multiculturalism enables group leaders to exercise "moral pressure" on group members, and that this is how identities are "imposed". But what distinguishes moral pressure from moral persuasion? What criteria do we use to distinguish legitimate forms of argumentation and mobilization from illegitimate "moral pressure", "force" and "imposition", and how can we address these latter problems without restricting basic civil and political liberties?

So far as I can tell, the post-multiculturalists have no answer to this question, and as a result, they offer no guidelines for how to revise the practice of multiculturalism.[10] If the problem is "moral pressure" within a group, rather than legal compulsion or extra-legal intimidation, what can and should a liberal democracy do, other than firmly insisting on the right of other citizens inside and outside the group to freely and democratically contest that particular script? Post-multiculturalists often conclude by emphasizing the necessity of enabling democratic contestation of scripts, but of course that simply restates a core part of liberal multiculturalism.

The right to democratic contestation is crucial, but it's worth noting that there was nothing in the Macedonian case that precluded such democratic contestation by those with alternate understandings of Macedonian and Greek identity. Indeed, this is clear from Cowan's own story: the reality is that the

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[10] This version of the post-multiculturalist critique arguably reproduces the very paternalistic logic that Phillips was objecting to – ie., it assumes that while members of the white majority can safely be trusted to engage in democratic persuasion and deliberation about their identities and cultures, members of minority groups are trapped in cultural scripts that pre-empt or override their capacity for autonomy, and "we" (the state, the white majority) need to intervene in these intra-group processes to fight the essentializers.

Macedonian activists have largely been unsuccessful in persuading people to adopt an exclusive Macedonian identity, precisely because they are not in a position to "force" or "impose" this identity on anyone. Minority activists are trying to peacefully and democratically persuade their co-ethnics to adopt a certain script about who they are as a group, but theirs is just one voice and one narrative in an ongoing democratic process of deliberation and contestation and persuasion. It's not clear what, if anything, Cowan would propose to change in this scenario.

So it's unclear what implications this version of the post-multiculturalist critique has for the real-world practice of multiculturalism. And so, unsurprisingly, Cowan too ends up hedging on what, if any, changes follow from her analysis. She concludes by saying that "the only tenable position for the engaged scholar [is] a paradoxical one: to support the demands for recognition of the Macedonian minority, but as a category that is chosen rather than imposed (whether explicitly or de facto), yet at the same time, to problematize rather than celebrate its project, and to query its emancipatory aura, examining the exclusions and cultural disenfranchisement it creates from within' (Cowan 2001: 171). She presents this as a critique of liberal multiculturalism, but, so far as I can tell, it is simply a restatement of liberal multiculturalism, both as it is theorized and as it is embodied in public policies and international law. Liberal multiculturalism, like Cowan, supports demands for recognition within liberal-democratic constraints that do not allow for the involuntary ascription of ethnic categories or for the undemocratic imposition of cultural scripts. So far as I can tell, like all of these post-multiculturalist authors, she offers no tangible recommendations for reform that differ from, or go beyond, a liberal multiculturalist framework.[11]

3. Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored what appears to be a nearly-unanimous consensus amongst recent writers that multiculturalism is guilty of essentialism, and that addressing this problem requires a radical overhaul of the multiculturalist project. I have suggested that, despite this seeming consensus, the implications of this critique are in fact indeterminate, in large part because critics fail to make clear their target, and hence the required remedy. While the different versions of this critique all point to legitimate issues – essentializing tendencies clearly exist in society - it's not clear in what ways liberal multiculturalism is contributing to these tendencies, and hence in what ways multiculturalism might need to be reformed. While all of the authors begin with a strong rhetorical commitment to a radical overhaul of multiculturalism, by the end of their analysis, they have all backed away from making any radical proposals for change. Indeed, so far as I can tell, they do not cite a single example of a group-differentiated right that liberal multiculturalists endorse that they would reject on essentialist (or other) grounds.

Ironically, I believe that this post-multiculturalist critique of essentialism is itself guilty of reification. According to critics, multiculturalism reifies ethnic groups as unified agents who speak and act with one unified voice. I would argue that this critique itself involves a reification of multiculturalism, treating it as if it is a single unified force that walks and talks out there in the world. According to critics, multiculturalism is actively "encouraging" people to think in essentialist terms, "pressuring" people to act in essentialist ways, even "forcing" and "imposing" essentialist identities and practices on people. But all of this talk of multiculturalism doing things out there in the world is hopelessly reified. Multiculturalism isn't a single actor or force that speaks with a single voice. It operates at different levels: theorists of multiculturalism say one set of things; laws, bureaucratic regulations and court decisions tell us another set of things; the media tell us yet another; and activists have their own message. We can't hope to figure out how to improve multiculturalism – or how to

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[11] Nor do I understand why she thinks of this as "paradoxical" – supporting minority rights within liberal-democratic constraints is a wholly consistent, unparadoxical position.

build a better post-multiculturalism, if you prefer – without pinning down which actors at which levels are responsible for which effects.

At the end of her book, Anne Phillips pleads for a new version of multiculturalism that puts agency at the centre of the project. I agree with this commitment to agency – as I noted earlier, autonomy is the foundational premise of my approach – but I would say that we need to put agency at the centre of any useful *critique* of multiculturalism. The post-multiculturalist literature is full of agentless processes. According to post-multiculturalists, there is this thing called multiculturalism that is telling people, encouraging people, pressuring people, forcing people – but it is never specified who is doing this talking, encouraging, pressuring or forcing. Is it theorists, legislators, bureaucrats, judges, social workers, educators, activists, media commentators? I believe that if we start to specify the actors, and hence the causal processes, it might turn out that liberal multiculturalism is not after all in need of a radical overhaul.

This is not to say that the early theorists of liberal multiculturalism somehow resolved all the key theoretical issues twenty years ago, and that the only task is to build the political will to more fully implement those theories. For one thing, the early theorists of multiculturalism had important disagreements amongst themselves, which remain unresolved.[12] Moreover, the world has changed in the past two decades, and new challenges have emerged that were barely even contemplated in the first wave of multiculturalist theories. Let me mention just a few of these issues:

1. Existing theories of liberal multiculturalism implicitly or explicitly operate on the assumption that immigrants are settled permanently in their country of residence, as opposed to being temporary visitors or migrant workers, and are intended to provide new models of inclusion for such permanent residents. Multiculturalism as a model of inclusion only become relevant and meaningful in Europe when it was accepted that post-war immigrants were "here to stay". For a period in the 1980s and 1990s, this was indeed the reigning assumption. But today we see a resurgence of programs of temporary or seasonal migration, both at the low end of the socio-economic ladder (eg., seasonal farm workers) and at the high end (skilled workers on short-term contracts). We also see sizeable numbers of unauthorized migrants and asylum seekers, both of whom face the prospect of being forced to return to their country of origin. This proliferation of migrant statuses, with varying and unpredictable durations of stay, has led to a situation that Vertovec calls "super diversity" (Vertovec 2005). It is far from clear, in either theory or practice, what sort of multiculturalism is appropriate in contexts other than permanent settlement.

2. Existing theories of liberal multiculturalism presuppose, implicitly or explicitly, that state-minority relations are "desecuritized" – that is, the governance of state-minority relations is seen as an issue of social policy to be addressed through the normal democratic process of claims-making, consultation, and debate, not as an issue of state security that trumps normal democratic processes. States are highly unlikely to accord multicultural rights to minorities who are seen as disloyal, or as potential collaborators with enemies. I have elsewhere argued that the vast bulk of state-minority relations in the West were indeed desecuritized in the post-war period, particularly in the crucial period of the `ethnic revival' in the 1960s to 1980s. This was true in relation to indigenous peoples, substate national minorities and most immigrants, and this made possible experiments in liberal multiculturalism (Kymlicka 2007). But today, particularly since 9/11, we see a resurgence of the security framework, most obviously in relation to Muslims. This has led to diminished support for multiculturalism, but also to subtle (or not so subtle) revisions to multiculturalism programs so that they focus on fighting radicalism rather than on issues of accommodation and inclusion. Multiculturalism, when it persists at all, is being used as a tool for monitoring and policing the behaviour of Muslims suspected of disloyalty. We can bemoan this distortion of multiculturalism, but we cannot

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[12] For example, see Parekh's critique of my work in Parekh 2000: chap. 3, and my critique of his work in Kymlicka 2001.

pretend as if issues of security do not exist. And this raises difficult questions, unresolved in theory or practice, about what we might call securitized multiculturalism, as distinct from the desecuritized multiculturalism theorized in the early 1990s.

In these two respects, some of the preconditions of liberal multiculturalism are eroding. Liberal multiculturalism, I would argue, was theorized for situations in which immigrants were seen as legally authorized, permanently settled, and presumptively loyal. In an age of securitization and super-diversity, these assumptions are put into question.

But even where these assumptions are still valid, there are important issues that were not adequately addressed in early theories of multiculturalism. Let me mention two of them:

3. Critics often claim that multiculturalism is about segregation and "parallel societies", and say that multiculturalism should therefore be replaced with a "civic integration" approach, built around things like language requirements and citizenship tests (Joppke 2004, 2007). Theorists of multiculturalism have always insisted that multiculturalism for immigrant groups is not about segregation, but rather is a mode of integration, aiming at fairer terms of inclusion. And so, at a conceptual level, there is no inherent inconsistency between multiculturalism policies and civic integration policies, and indeed countries like Canada and Australia have always had robust integration policies alongside their robust multiculturalism policies. But we do not yet have good theories about the relationship between civic integration policies and multiculturalism policies, and about when the former complement or subvert the latter.[13] And this in turn raises even deeper questions about the relationship between multiculturalism and nationalism. While critics often assume that multiculturalism aims to dislodge the centrality of national identities, and that is therefore pushes us towards a post-national world, it may well be the case that multiculturalism works best when it is seen as a constituent part of national identities, and when it pushes us towards a more "multicultural nationalism". This indeed has been the argument recently made by Varun Uberoi (2008). Yet the conceptual links between multiculturalism and nationhood remain under-theorized.

4. Finally, in retrospect, it seems clear that early theories of multiculturalism did not adequately address the specific challenges that religion raises. This is certainly true of the "Canadian school" of multiculturalism, reflected in the work of people like Taylor, Tully, Carens and my own work, which was heavily shaped by the claims of the Quebecois and Aboriginal peoples, neither of whom mobilize around faith-based claims. Even immigrant groups in Canada have not historically mobilized around religion, at least not until very recently. Multiculturalism in the Canadian context has therefore been theorized in terms of language, territory, race, ethnicity and indigeneity, rather than religion. This inattention to religion has been rightly criticized by many scholars (eg., Modood 2007). By contrast, public debates in Europe today around multiculturalism are almost exclusively focused on religion, and particularly on Muslims. This raises a whole host of complex issues, not least about the meaning of secularism and about when multicultural claims framed in the language of faith are or are not consistent with secularism. These issues are rendered even more intractable in many countries by the fact that states have rarely been consistent over time in the way they have interpreted secularism, with the result that there is typically a palimpsest of different accommodations reached at different times with different religious groups. In evaluating faith-based claims, should our goal be to implement what we now as a society take to be the most persuasive interpretation of the requirements of secularism, even if this means that newer religious groups are denied long-standing accommodations that were offered to earlier religious groups? Or should we rather aim to ensure that there is no discrimination between religious groups, and hence ensure that any accommodations negotiated in the past for one group be offered today to newer groups? In

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[13] For some preliminary reflections, see Kymlicka 2011.

my view, this is not a rhetorical question: it is a genuine moral dilemma, for which again we lack good theoretical tools (Kymlicka 2009).

This is just a sample of the unresolved issues confronting theorists of multiculturalism. One could quickly expand the list, particularly if we move beyond the immigrant case to also consider unresolved issues around the claims of substate national minorities and indigenous peoples. So there is no shortage of theoretical work remaining to be done, on the proliferating forms of diversity, the securitization of diversity, the link with civic integration and national identities, and with religion and secularism. On all of these issues and others, early theories of multiculturalism now seem at best incomplete, and at worst outdated, resting on assumptions and preconditions that may no longer apply.

Yet I would argue that on all of these issues, neither the `post-multiculturalism' nor the `anti-multiculturalism' literature is of much help. Both have misidentified the nature and goals of multiculturalism, and hence misdiagnosed the challenges we face, and prematurely closed off theoretical and practical options that deserve our attention. In facing up to the challenges of the 21st century, I would still argue that multiculturalism remains a viable starting point.

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