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Why Multiculturalism Makes People So Angry and Sad

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Since the 1970s multiculturalism has served as a category that has widened the conceptual framework of public policy, cultural philosophy and aesthetic practice. After 2001 it has slid into the twilight zone of a zombie concept.[1] The current bout of simplistic slogans and jingoistic dismissals of multiculturalism are not new in content. However, never before has there been such a unified challenge against the viability of this concept from such senior public figures. In 2011, starting with the German Chancellor Merkel, followed by both the French President Sarkozy and the British Prime Minister Cameron, there was a chorus of complaints and declarations that it has failed. In the same year, Brevik's violent spree shocked Europe. However, while his actions were widely condemned, it was also rather shocking that his belief that multiculturalism is a threat to European identity was never subject to an equivalent degree of condemnation. Brevik was quickly portrayed as a deranged lunatic, and this seemed sufficient to exempt his ideological claims from any wider scrutiny.

The experimentation with multiculturalism in Europe has been mostly at the symbolic level. Rhetorical claims about its success or failure bear little correlation to structural reforms. By contrast, in settler nations like Canada and Australia, where the

concept was invented and pioneered, the institutional impact has been far more significant. However, this has not meant that multiculturalism has consolidated an irreversible position. Unlike other social institutions, such as public education, where if there is a failing *in* its delivery, then the response is not elevated into a debate on the failure *of* the institution. In this chapter I will reflect on the status of multiculturalism by considering the 'ways' it is seen in Australia. In particular, I will examine the perspective through which the prior concepts of culture, multiplicity and unity are viewed, and ask whether we have a neutral standpoint for seeing their formation and their imbrication? In other words, do we assume that these concepts have a fixed form? And how does this form affect the perception of the relationship between these concepts? Does it imply that the relationship is already constrained by being in either a compatible or a conflictual framework? In conclusion, I will also reflect on the future of multiculturalism by tracing the underlying cosmopolitan vision in the interviews that I conducted with a couple of the pioneering activists for multiculturalism and a recent exhibition in Australia.

Not looking at multiculturalism

The conservative rhetoric of hostility and aversion towards multiculturalism that is now commonplace in Europe was already a feature of the Howard government in Australia (1996–2007). Ministers gleefully rebuked the excesses of political correctness, ridiculed the advocates of 'mushy' multiculturalism, and had no hestitation in showing contempt for the migrants who they claimed were stuck in their ghettoes and could not even speak English. Howard was famous for being unable to even utter the 'm' word until his Greek Australian advisor Arthus Sinodinos suggested that he see it as a uniquely Australian achievement rather than as a foreign imposition.[2] Henceforth, and with a kind of stuttering reluctance, Howard was able to acknowledge Australian multiculturalism because it showed 'that we have developed an Australian way of doing things'.[3] It became acceptable

insofar as it was seen as the tool that facilitated the transition of foreigners in becoming Australian. This was part of a concerted effort to pull back the swing of the cultural pendulum — an attempt to direct efforts towards the validation and valorisation of national values, and to emphasise that the sole function of multiculturalism was to enhance national cohesiveness. In broad historical terms, multiculturalism was accused of promoting a masochistic discourse that exaggerated racial injustices, unfairly rewarded minorities, and distracted attention from the great success stories in Australian settlement.

Howard's effort to correct the previous experimentation with cultural diversity was occurring in a context of growing anxiety over global competition. Amid a period of radical socio-economic transformation and an increasing awareness of the impact of global forces on everyday life, the political viability of the multiculturalism switched from a category that widened the delivery of welfare services and opened the horizons of cultural innovations towards a mechanism that could enhance Australia's global trade relations and strengthen social cohesion. The status of multiculturalism as an aesthetic category was also split along two diametrically opposed objectives: elite cultural agents and institutions were encouraged to go out and succeed on the global arena, while 'ethnic' or community-based organisations were expected to define their vision by how they conformed to local needs.

With the election of the Australian Labor Party in 2007 there has been a lessening of the negative discourse towards multiculturalism. At the senior level of government leadership there is no longer a routine stigmatic continuum between multiculturalism, open door policies on migration and global terrorism. Nevertheless, there is a prevailing unease over the balance of interaction between global and the local, and a strong emphasis that cultural diversity should not be gained at the expense of national cohesion. Hence, multiculturalism is expected to contribute to success in global competitions, as well as strengthening the bonds in community building.

In the absence of aggressive rhetoric from the political elites, the concept of multiculturalism has slipped under the radar of the mainstream media. However, this has also meant that the difficult challenge of working out what is meant by this concept has also dissipated. This is a historical moment when the thinking on multiculturalism should go beyond mere proclamations of being for or against it. In demographic terms, Australia is incontrovertibly multicultural. The United Nations comprises 196 member states. The suburb of Dandenong on the outskirts of Melbourne has inhabitants that originate from 194 countries. I am not sure which are the missing two states, but you do not need to find a representative from every state in the world in order to start feeling global. In short, this is not the time for either the promotion or assault on multiculturalism, but a critical period in which it is necessary to examine the ways through which we are already becoming more and more multicultural.

In a recent review of the theoretical debates on multiculturalism, Vijay Mishra has adopted a tone and outlook that echoes a testimonial. The eulogy begins with the following proposition: 'The contested and contestable field of multiculturalism has the principle of justice at its core; it is its driving force, and without it any explanatory model is incomplete'.[4] This is a serious definition that places the role of reason in the deliberative process of the negotiation over political rights and responsibility. However, he also adds that there is a need for 'sensitivity towards minority and discrepant cultures' as well as critical reappraisals of the modes of scholarly research. Such qualifications widen the frame. But they also return us to the fundamental issues that confronted scholars and activist when they first envisaged a multicultural discourse. The concept is deeply embedded in a normative discourse of civic rights, but it also provokes reflection on how we appreciate the forms of culture and modes of understanding in a social context that is dynamic.

Walter Lippmann, the founding chair, Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, and founding member of the Federation of

Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia, defined multiculturalism in similar terms. He stressed the freedom of religious, linguistic and social customs, as well as equality in terms of access to civic resources and services. In response to the broader domain of sharing common values, he also added: 'There would be diversity, equality, empathy of interaction. All groups would stress tolerance of cultural, linguistic and religious differences, which would be complementary to the loyalties the individual shares with other Australians, and which form part of his or her identity as an Australia in the Australian ethos.'[5] The scope of this definition is easily passed over without pause for reflection on the significance of phrases such as 'empathy of interaction'. This brief phrase addresses the concept of justice in its widest horizons. It evokes a form of recognition that emerges not only though reasoned deliberation over self-entitlement or civic duty, but also from emotional connection with others.

In the preface to Mishra's critical retrospective on the concept of multiculturalism, he confesses that his life story and that of his children is deeply intertwined with the 'encounters with an array of ethnic communities in Perth'.[6] Multiculturalism is represented as a 'private interest' that has motivated him to read a wide range of theoretical, literary, and political texts, and thereby provided the platform to 'pursue this passion as an intellectual exercise'.[7] How do these private and public, intellectual and passionate, empathic and communal categories meet on the horizon of multiculturalism?

This fusion of categories is not easy to read in critical readings of key texts and it is routinely glossed in political definitions. Despite this, I will argue that the interplay between the sentimental and the normative is a powerful force in the shaping of multicultural visions. It is not just a matter of making liberalism and liberals live up to liberal manners. This struggle to accommodate multiculturalism within liberalism is often controversial, but it is actually rather simple to define and defend. It was a strategy that was successfully deployed from the early 1970s

until the mid to late 1980s. Throughout this period the rights of minorities and women were defined in a way that was both emancipatory, in that what was previously ignored or denied was acknowledged; and reformist, in that it extended the reach of these rights to new subjects. However, as will become evident in the course of this chapter, even the pioneering advocates have come to the conclusion that multiculturalism did little to alter the frameworks of social transformation.

The empathy and passion that is intimated in Lippmann and Mishra point towards an ambiguous zone that exceeds the deliberative parameters of social justice. The political discussion on the reception of Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s also provides a glimpse of a humanitarianism that approaches but never quite articulates a cosmopolitan vision. The positive role played by the Fraser government in advocating a humanitarian response is now widely known. Of course, I am not so naïve as to take at face value either Malcolm Fraser's own memoir of these events,[8] or even the recent evaluation of the handling of the refugee crisis in the 1970s as a rare moment of 'political decency'.[9]

Clearly, these events were not exempt from the complicities of 'normal' politics, and the eventual bipartisan support was not based on pure humanitarian issues. Nothing is ever 'pure' in politics, and there was no sudden cultural relief from the historical fears and racist slurs that are routinely projected against migrants and refugees. The geo-political obligations between Australia and its partners in the ASEAN regional structures, as well as its obligations under UN treaties, had clearly exerted force on the government. There were also powerful pressures from the media. Further, it is sobering to remember that this was also the period in which we witnessed the emergence of the first bipartisan use of the term 'queue jumpers' in the Houses of Parliament, which further entrenched the stigmatic view that refugees are either unwittingly embedded in criminal networks or are suspicious individuals who seek to gain unfair advantage by gaining access through the 'back door'.[10]

Despite the overt political exigencies and expediencies of the time something else also occurred. A glimpse of this understated humanitarian consensus can be witnessed in the relative silence that was held by the opposition Labor party.

At the time, Moss Cass was Shadow Minister for Immigration, and he recalls his fellow parliamentarian Lionel Bowen expressing the view that the boats should be intercepted and prevented from landing. Cass replied: 'Well, what are you going to do? What — turn them back to sea, they're coming, you can't do that.' At that point Cass also noted that 'the bells rang and we had to go into Parliament'. Discussion on the issue had come to a premature halt and yet, 'in the next meeting, not a word about it'. Bowen had come to the view of: 'Yeah, we've got to take them in.' Cass reflected on this change of heart and realised that his own intervention was almost negligible: 'They'd gone and they'd thought about it. I didn't persuade him anymore than that.'[11] In Cass's terms the possibility to pause allowed a check on the gut reaction of seeing the refugee as a source of threat and an opening for a broader understanding of human needs.

But is the 'time out' from normal debate, signalled in this instance by the ringing of the bell, all that was necessary to hold back from a populist reaction? How do we characterise this 'something else' that happened in that break and which allowed Bowen to make the begrudging acceptance to 'take them in'? The reception of unexpected refugees and the internalisation of discrepant cultures are often perceived in the same terms: 'How do we accommodate this difference without threatening the foundations upon which our fragile security rests?' Bowen's first response was consistent with the widespread view in the Labor movement that each boatload of refugees means another threat to the rights and conditions of the local workforce. However, his subsequent acceptance to 'take them in' was also expressive of a laconic empathy.

This incident returns us to the fundamental challenge of living with difference and making some temporary accommodations for people in desperate need. Why does this issue surface in public debates with a sense of fatigue? Why does the big experiment with multiculturalism appear as if it is over? How did we go from a vision of multiculturalism that contained an implicit form of cosmopolitan humanitarianism — which Lippman defined in terms of 'empathy of interaction' — to a series of policy adjustments that at best preserve the concept by reducing it to an instrumental tool for global competitiveness and nationalistic self-affirmation?

Scope of vision and the limits of liberalism

One of the limitations for thinking through the challenges of multiculturalism is found in the perspective through which the issue is examined. In Australia there are three tiers of governance: federal, state and local. The perception of what is multiculturalism almost always shifts in relation to the perspective through which it is being seen. Even the most cursory reviews of the discourse on multiculturalism reveal profound disjunctions and at times outright contradictions between these different tiers.

The tension between competing viewpoints cannot be reduced to ideological differences, as it is often the case that members who belong to the same party but operate within separate tiers also uphold contrasting positions. A higher degree of clarification, connection and coordination between these tiers could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The policy discourse would also benefit from a greater level of feedback from philosophical debate and critical awareness of the aesthetic practices that emerge in everyday contexts. However, it is also worth considering whether it deserves a different 'way of seeing'. Cultural differences are constitutive features in both the local and the global. Every time a minority culture expresses a worldview that is inconsistent with the dominant culture there is an anxiety that the two cultures will

never fit in the same space. This accommodation problem can be viewed from two contrasting perspectives. One way of seeing this challenge is to examine each new claim with a kind of forensic microscopic scrutiny, and the other requires a spherical overview.

The forensic perspective is the characteristic viewpoint of liberalism. This is not the place for restaging the debate as to whether the racist underpinnings or the inherent ethnic bias in liberalism provide an insurmountable obstacle for a genuine accommodation with multiculturalism. Rather than examining whether the fault lines are structural, or as some advocates would prefer, as an incidental consequence of the faulty application of liberal principles, my concern is to consider how it actually sees the issue of difference. Is there a universal orientation within liberalism that allows an open engagement with the difference in other cultures, or does its method of incorporating otherness revolve around its particularistic viewpoint, so that the relationship with difference is always a form of blurred domestication? The response to this question is usually cast in terms of the centrality of the liberal value of tolerance and the capacity of liberal structures to translate other values into its own. However, tolerance and translation are also 'perspectival' concepts that frame the scope of vision. They can admit or reject elements that narrow or widen the margins for reception, and skew the direction of perception. The focus points for addressing difference can be either a mirror that reflects an established self-image, or a prism that fragments and varies the image according to the dynamics of the encounter. In short, these perspectives shape the way we see culture.

The way we see culture involves an apparatus that shapes and produces a sensory awareness of the world. The apparatus is never neutral. It works on the senses and reinforces a given frame for perception as it marginalises or displaces sensory perceptions that are registered as discordant. Each perspective produces its own inherent distortion effect. However, it also constructs a preference to not focus on its own bias and predisposed inclination. All ways of seeing other cultures produce interpretations and judgement.

A person who looks at other cultures also sees himself looking back at his own culture. This culture becomes the reference point. The starting point from which the horizon of the other is measured is always relative and subjective, but it is often used as if it were absolute and objective. The function of perspective is most overt in the social construction of norms and values. What is less considered is its application on the sensorium. We are less accustomed to questioning the ways in which perspective not only conveys the data generated by our senses, but the working through of the sensory generation of data.

The impressions of hope and fear that seemingly arise from our most intimate space — our body — is, it turns out, deeply affected by the worldly perspectives we inherit and adopt. Hence, both the normative and aesthetic worlds are deeply entwined by perspective. Seeing *through* multiculturalism is therefore not just an exercise in negation via exposure, but an acknowledgement of the medium of perspective in making connections.[12] It is distinct from the proposition of looking at multiculturalism, which at best prompts a contemplative approach and at worst leads us into the dead ends of objectification. I am proposing that seeing through multiculturalism is an inherent part of a spherical perspective.

These perspectival questions are critical for understanding the kinds of knowledge that any worldview constructs. For instance, when the political scientists Galligan and Roberts[13] conduct a forensic analysis of the history of government reports on multiculturalism within the framework of liberal theory, and conclude that it is at best a pointless and at worst divisive cultural policy, then it is worth considering how this assessment is not simply a reflection of a racist or paranoid mindset, but also the product of an antagonistic perspective that establishes cultural difference as an entity that either exists in a fragmented form and will inevitably dissipate, or as an intransigent rival that seeks to overtake the whole. From either viewpoint, the relationship between multiculturalism and the liberal state is either reduced to futile palliative care, or allowed to become an exercise in self-destruction. In this version

of liberalism, multiculturalism becomes threatening when the autonomy of culture shifts from the private to the public sphere. This is controversial on a number of fronts: first, there is tension over the demarcation lines between private beliefs and the public rituals that shape the common social structures and norms. The apparatus for seeing other cultures is meant to be neutral and all encompassing, and yet it is the neutrality and selectivity of this vision that becomes contestable. In an antagonistic framework the minor culture will consider itself to be under the scrutiny of a hostile gaze or one-eyed view of the world and thereby retreat into the private sphere, or face public annihilation.

Liberalism also contains another viewpoint. In the agonistic version, minority cultures and the dominant culture are perpetually entangled in a struggle for hegemony over the boundary between public and private. Whether the boundary is fixed or rendered fluid in this kind of cultural struggle is a complex process, but its general features are again 'easy' to define and defend in terms of a forensic perspective. In this mode it relies on cross-cultural mediators to translate the degrees of compatibility and demonstrate the tolerability of incommensurable cultural differences. There is nevertheless a persistent gaze upon the other — an effort to work out the identity of cultural difference. Disputes over the neutrality of this apparatus shift between the terms of mediation and the conditions of reception. However, even in the agonistic mode, there is an assumption that multiculturalism contains a distinctive set of 'things' that need to be identified, recognised and valued.

We can see instances of the antagonistic confrontations when the discourse is framed as zero-sum game. Minorities accuse the dominant of racist exclusion. The dominant defends its boundaries and justifies its exclusions on the grounds of protecting its own values. In both viewpoints there is an attempt to see what is *in* the other culture, and then develop a position against *it*, or incorporate the bits that fit. The forensic perspective does have a sense of social justice at its core, but it is the kind of 'blind justice' that only

judges things that can be weighed up against each other according to a pre-existing standard. The dominant assumes that the standard is universal, whereas the minority claims that the standard unfairly reflects the pre-existing values. Hence, such 'blind justice' has limited capacity to correct and compensate minorities. My concern now is not with the politics of this social justice, but its capacity to see another element that is implicit in multiculturalism. What if the difficulty of speaking about the driving force of multiculturalism isn't simply about the presence or absence of the things in culture? This kind of perspective does not simply focus down on the points of distinction within minority cultures, but zooms out to see the emergent whole. In this case we would need to go from a forensic to a spherical optic.

Unfortunately, the prospects of a switch in perspective are not very bright. I am not only referring to the violent anger of racists or the contemptuous dismissals launched by leading politicians; I have also noted that among the pioneering voices of multicultural activism there is now a profound sense of loss and melancholy. This is because nobody likes the categories within which culture is being squeezed. There is despairing sense that culture has been forced to fight over a predestined and instrumental terrain.

I will argue that alongside this palpable expression of frustration there is nevertheless a persistent counterbeat in these voices. In the following section I will draw on interviews that I conducted in 2012 with Antigone Kefala and George Papadopoulos in order to tease out the extent to which their vision of multiculturalism is not simply based on a forensic analysis of the positive difference that multiculturalism can offer to the nation, but that it is also expressive of a conversation with an immanent, cosmopolitan other.

All fish-eyed and in the same boat

According to Antigone Kefala, the author and first ethnic arts officer at the peak funding body Australia Council, the impact of all the state policies to protect and enhance the cultural

contribution of minorities has been 'uncertain'. She concluded an interview on this subject by declaring that she could not find any evidence of genuine cross-cultural innovation and ended by expressing regret that the mainstream Australian culture is still a 'very closed shop'.

This sombre reflection requires some unpicking before we simply give up and declare the whole project a waste of time and resources. Kefala was appointed to the Australia Council as a consequence of the recommendations of the Galbally Report (1978). This report directed the cultural sector to find new means of support for the survival and inclusion of the cultural practices of ethnic minorities. These issues had been vigorously raised by ethnic activists and discussed in the newly emerging ethnic media. As an ethnic arts officer, Kefala claims that it was her role 'to activate the field'. This was no small task because, as she bemoaned, 'there were people out there who didn't know that they were entitled to anything'. From her personal experience and as a result of various fora, she could confirm that there were numerous artists who had excelled in various artistic genres and other national contexts who were not recognised by the dominant authorities.

Kefala saw that it was her role to advocate for recognition of these achievements. At one level this advocacy should be rather straightforward; it was a matter of establishing either the terms by which these cultural practices either complement the existing canon, or the basis upon which practitioners from different backgrounds could calibrate their performance skills. It could be argued that within the Australian cultural sector there have been sporadic but moderate levels of success in terms of this level of recognition.

I would suggest that the depths of Kefala's pessimism over the future of multiculturalism is linked to a frustration to articulate and facilitate an implicit aesthetic cosmopolitanism. Her strongest memory of the impact of state policies on multiculturalism was not the production of any specific event, but the stimulation of a

'rapport' with different people. At a time when her colleagues were far from convinced of the aesthetic merits and social value of the art from minority communities, she persisted to define and defend its worthiness. This identification with artists from diverse backgrounds was in part inspired by her own experiences: 'I was absolutely like them, in the same boat.' But it was also pushed by the conceptual shift that occurred in this 'boat':

> Everyone who doesn't know another language assumes the static nature, or the static assumption, or the static evaluations of languages. But actually when you go from one culture to another you see everything is relative. You know it works in certain instances and it changes and becomes something else.

These personal reflections were also complemented by a vision of the social contribution that this 'fish-eyed' cultural perspectivalism could offer: 'It could make society much more open, much more intelligent.' Kefala admits that this benefit is difficult to measure. In her own writing practice she claims that while this trace is 'constant', it is also almost 'invisible'. She finds it impossible to specify exactly how it has modified her own practice other than noting that the awareness of how 'meanings constantly differ — they have some other subtleties and so on. And this is why people always find that my English is not English.'

George Papadopoulos had similar difficulty in defining the broader framework in which his own cultural identity is situated. He too was a pioneering figure in the development of multiculturalism in Australia. As the son of Greek migrants he had observed the effects of discrimination in everyday life. Being trained as a lawyer and working on numerous cases that involved migrants he also noted the inadequate and unfair treatment that they received. Migrants were disadvantaged because they lacked the resources to either grasp or activate their own entitlements. Papadopoulos also had the good fortune to meet with Walter Lippmann.[14]

The guidance offered by Lippmann reinforced Papadopoulos' own understanding of the shortcomings in governmental responses to migrant needs and the need to lobby for access and equity to these resources and services. Papadopoulos and his brother-in-law, Dr Spiro Moraitis, took the welfare model developed in the Melbourne Jewish community and adapted it to serve the needs of the Greek community. While serving on many of the state and federal bodies that were established to identify and promote ethnic and multicultural policies, Papadopoulos also lobbied for the expansion of government services.

In Papadopoulos' recollection of this tumultuous period, he makes constant reference to a defensive cultural and political outlook. The narrative of his engagement with multiculturalism clearly identifies the points of lack and struggle. He recalls the way he was patronised and the extent to which other migrants were discriminated. He shared Walter Lippmann's suspicion towards government agencies and asserted that it was necessary to be firm, if not outright antagonistic, when confronting government officials.

He was also angry at people from his own community and generation who 'were hiding away from our Greekness', or only interested in supporting nostalgic and backward-looking cultural institutions like the Greek Orthodox church. Papadopoulos also observed that the various ethnic communities were partially successful at convincing governments that there was a thing called an 'ethnic vote', and this pressure was sufficient to achieve some positive outcomes. However, he also expressed regret that they failed to develop a common ground upon which they could meet and work together. 'We never worked together. They stayed in their framework and we stayed in ours.' For instance, he claimed that Italians thought that the Greeks were too 'hard headed'.

He concluded that the survival of Greekness hinged on what he defined as a mode of ethnic pluralism. All minorities would have the right to determine their own cultural structures,

but would also enter in a cooperative political arrangement. In short, there would be greater cultural freedom and stronger civic engagement.

For Papadopoulos, 'ethnicity and citizenship are not necessarily linked … it never occurred to me that there was a conflict between being a Greek and an Australian citizen'. However, when I asked whether this model has secured the basis of his own cultural identity, he replied: 'I think part of my culture is broader than things Greek.' As I probed further and asked him to describe this other part, he responded at first with nervous sarcasm. 'Buggered if I know — cosmopolitan.'

While anxious to not appear too idealistic, he also added: 'I've read enormously since I was a kid. I mean, instead of letting me go out and play in the streets, Mum would buy me books.' Books exposed him to a world that was different to the one on the streets of Melbourne, and he admits that 'there's always been a desire and it shows up in my attitude towards reading' to see things in a 'broader context'. While Papadopoulos had no difficulty in narrating his own political struggles for the recognition of minority rights within a liberal framework, and he could intimate the broader intellectual context that informed his cultural outlook, he also confessed that the 'broader part' of his culture — his own identification as a cosmopolitan — was difficult to articulate. 'I'm having difficulty with that. I'm just wondering why I am having difficulty in explaining myself. Maybe I'm inhibited in the back somewhere because of the accommodations I had to make politically, to get things through.'

Papadopoulos admits that when he tries to incorporate all the influences and ideas that he is interested in: 'you end up with this mish-mash of sentences and phrases, and word. And trying to put them all together is at times extraordinarily difficult.' As he reflects on this challenge and compares it to the 'defensive thing about being Greek', he concludes that in the past 'it was so much easier'. The framework for incorporating the cosmopolitan agenda seems so much harder than the earlier model of ethnic pluralism.

Opaque manifestations of the now

Recently, a young art school graduate came to me for advice. Sapna Chandu was angry about the shortcomings of her education and the prevailing discourse in the contemporary visual arts. She noted that while the terms 'multiculturalism', 'cultural difference' and 'post-colonialism' are all very familiar in the art world, there is now a sense that these ideas are redundant, passé and pointless. The message she got over and over again was: 'If you want to be at the cutting edge look elsewhere.'

This situation infuriated Sapna Chandu and she wanted help to put these issues back on the table. I thought that I recognised her anger and assumed that this was a generational struggle for the space to inscribe its own narrative into the public arena. It also appeared to me that the multicultural and post-colonial agenda had been receding from the critical edges of cultural debates and that it needed new voices to breathe air into its right to speak for the present. I encouraged her to see this as part of a struggle of 'making yourself visible'. Bad advice! In a remarkably short period of time in 2012, Sapna Chandu organised a whole mini-festival, *Manifestations of Now*, which included a screening program on the large screen at Federation Square and a public forum.

As a participant in this process, I slowly realised that her struggle was more than a contest for making identity visible. The terrain upon which the struggle for visibility was conducted and the horizons of contestation were rather different to the one I envisaged. In the past, the process of asserting the need for a multicultural discourse was both a critique of the canon and the assertion of counter discourses that sought to validate alternate modes of cultural expression and identity. This struggle was often conceived in terms of creating spaces for a plurality of cultural viewpoints that were either absent from or marginal to the dominant discourse. To use Charles Taylor's phrase, a great deal of the debate over the cultural terrain was defined in terms of the politics of recognition. A considerable level of energy was generated by the friction of perceived exclusion and the heat from

absent voices coming into the light. The current predicament contained elements of this critique but they also seemed to intimate something else.

The window display of the pop-up gallery in the atrium of Melbourne's Federation Square included an artwork with a sequence of ironic remarks on the politics of inclusivity. In 'Estrella' (2009), Paula Do Prado created a tapestry that mimics the format of a flag and is coloured in the iconic 'baggy' green. It is inscribed with a message that ends in the declaration: 'We are very LUCKY to be here, we are HAPPY in our DIVERSITY, go team, ALL TOGETHER NOW.' This cheerful, sportsman-like, nationalistic lingo evokes the return of a cultural boundary that probably never left the scene. It touched that raw nerve about the impatience towards the whinging stranger and the rush to embrace others who are already playing the same game.

This concern to make sure that difference does not disrupt the performance of the 'team' may be a peculiar and recurring anxiety in the Australian national imaginary. However, its current manifestation provokes reflection on the paradox that diversity is 'in' the team, but that the team should still 'go' as if nothing has really changed. It was at this point that I got a different perspective on the frustration that Supna Chandu expressed when she first came to see me. The struggle for multiculturalism was no longer being debated in terms of absence or presence, but in terms of its opaque and trivialised modes of inclusion. Multiculturalism was being rendered redundant because it was equated with pointless and passing things. So it was no longer absent from the public arena, it was there, all too visible as a shallow thing that anyone could look at and look right through. It was this sense of being seen and nothing of value being noticed that set Sapna Chandu ablaze with fury.

Toward a spherical imaginary

I wish to end at a point that is close to where I began. Multiculturalism has always had, as Vijay Mishra argued, the

'principle of justice at its core'. This principle has been relatively easy to define and defend. The scope of these definitions and defences may remain in dispute, but as Mishra's survey of the field demonstrates, the philosophical terrain has not strayed far from the terms of liberalism and is therefore not entirely foreign or incomprehensible. In fact, Mishra makes the rather depressing observation that the theoretical debates on multiculturalism have been little more than footnotes to the Charles Taylor's theory of recognition. When you consider the stories told by people like Kefala and Papadopoulos, it is clear that the status of minority cultures have been transformed as they have been incorporated into the mainstream political framework. So why do both Kefala and Papadopoulos offer such a melancholic view over the achievements of multiculturalism?

A conventional answer is that multiculturalism has fallen into the trap of selective incorporation: small bits were brought into the arena so that they could be disconnected from their own generative context and then neutralised as they performed the role of being a representative of a constituency that is alienated from the institutional framework. This would offer some understanding of the frustration and melancholy that is expressed in the voices of multicultural activists and artists. You can hear liberals saying 'You have got what you asked for, equal opportunity and access to the services and resources, so what are you complaining about!'

Of course, this argument was taken one step further, when the neo-liberal agenda took hold in the 1990s and Peter Shergold realised that the future of multiculturalism was no longer about culture and welfare, but in maximising economic competitiveness on a global scale.[15] At this point activists could justifiably think that in the absence of state support, the survival of minority cultures was in peril and that assimilationism was being recalled to provide the necessary linchpin for securing the nation in the context of global competition.

I would like to offer another explanation that runs alongside this political answer. Let me recall Papadopoulos' comment on his difficulty to define the broader dimensions of his own cultural outlook and his suggestion that this 'inhibition' might be related to all the political 'accommodations' he had made in order to get things done. Similarly, I would like to hold in mind Kefala's observation of the persistent but invisible trace that the encounter with other cultures forms in her own creative imagination. The interplay between these two comments articulates the point that is contained in my conjunction of aesthetic cosmopolitanism and activist multiculturalism.[16] To the extent that multiculturalism was confined to a process of negotiating the rights and responsibilities of minorities within a liberal state, then it could easily be swept into a managerial agenda. This agenda has become more opaque as the criteria for its viability has shifted from state-centric forms of social justice to global economic competitiveness.

The cultural practices of multiculturalism do not necessarily depend on the survival of multicultural social policies. There has been considerable debate in Australia about how the underlying ideas that are used to define multiculturalism are too vague, and that it has failed to either gain traction within existing state structures, or generate any viable alternative institutional forms. Hence, there is the persistent fear that it has a divisive effect in the national imaginary. The blame game on the causes of this failure can be played two ways: the state system can be identified as being intrinsically resistant to a multicultural agenda, or alternatively it could be argued that the advocates of a multicultural vision have not succeeded in defining a position that fits within the discourse of the state. During the activist and welfarist phases of multiculturalism, the role of the state was considered to be crucial for developing the spheres of civic participation of minorities. The articulation of multiculturalism coincided with the apex of the state as the hegemonic force for integrating socio-economic functions. However, in the past two decades the central function of the state has shifted towards a regulative

rather than integrative force. This has narrowed the opportunities for engaging with multiculturalism. But, as I have argued, there are many levels of the state. The different levels are often operating according to contradictory needs and proceeding along divergent trajectories. At present, there is very little if any coordination between the local, regional and national agencies. Being unsuccessful at one level does not mean that it has totally failed at all others. However, rather than simply clinging onto a hope that a multicultural agenda may accommodate itself within the state structures, or demonstrate the complex nesting between multicultural practices and local forms of governance, it is also important to shift the focus away from a state-centric vision of the future of multiculturalism.

The pejorative and dismissive comments made by numerous Western leaders about the failures of multiculturalism are indicative of a dual anxiety. It points towards a profound unease towards an emergent multicultural worldview, and a discomfort over the decline of the integrative functions of the nation state. As Western states outsourced and privatised key institutional functions, they effectively multiplied and dispersed the sites where the social and the economic could meaningfully intersect. However, they also diluted and fragmented the extent to which these sites could reflect and concentrate the narratives of the national imaginary. Having decoupled the links between place, culture and economy, there is now a growing sense that not only is the nation under threat from the globalising economic trajectories, but also by the diasporic communities that increasingly bypass the national culture. This is encapsulated in the phrase 'home grown terrorism'. At present, Western states are seeking to ground their legitimacy by heightening the regulative apparatus. In this context, Merkel, Sarkozy and Cameron fear that if multiculturalism was pursued to its logical conclusion, then the spirit of competition could lead to segregation and cannibalism. The same could be said about neoliberalism. The strong would eat the weak, and the remainders would retreat into defensive and vengeful ghettoes. The only thing

that is supposedly stopping society from brute violence is the state. But every day, the state of the state is more dissolute and its bonds with the people are weaker.

If multiculturalism is merely the management of the survival of diverse but non-threatening forms of cultural practices and the transition of 'emerging' communities into full civic participation, then it is hardly at the 'cutting edge' of culture. If that is all that multiculturalism is, then it is inevitably destined towards it own redundancy. The activist is reduced to offering palliative care to minority culture or doing consultancy work for migrants to gain quicker entry into the main game. However, in the words of these multicultural activists and artists, there is also the intimation of a wider cultural outlook that also conveys an unspoken but different conception of social justice. This is a form of justice that is not restricted to the state's capacity to distribute resources, and it invokes a sense of citizenship that appeals to the cosmos of common humanity.

Perhaps the frustration and melancholy of multicultural activism is its inability to step out of the pitfalls of the politics of recognition from the state and speak towards a cosmopolitan imaginary. The deliberative frameworks for defining social justice have been almost exclusively defined within the paradigm of the nation state. According to Ulrich Beck,[17] the cosmopolitanisation of the world will also compel the creation of new frameworks. In this context, the future of multiculturalism is very different. It is no longer reduced to the management of diversity within the nation and separate from the universal and immanent questions of being and belonging. Multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism are now two sides of the process by which the local and the broader concepts of culture speak to each other.

This vision of multiculturalism is not a utopian projection of a future state of equality. It arises from the frustration with the constrictions in which all of culture is now being pincered into. It is also an expression of exasperation against the tantalising possibilities that are immanent, but not yet fully voiced in contemporary

society. In the past, multiculturalism has been defended by mediators who sought to translate cultural differences within tolerable margins. This approach has led people like Kefala and Papadopoulos to lament that not only have the margins barely changed but that their own conversations with their immanent cosmopolitan other have been stunted. To have a genuine conversation we must all learn the art of hospitality and forego the narcissistic view that all other cultures are but mere variations on our own. But from where does this art for hospitality commence, and toward which horizon does it head?

In the forensic perspective, one would seek to recognise the difference that other cultures contain. In the spherical perspective, one would not only work out how different things fit together, but also discover what is new in the encounter with the other. This other is not automatically 'cognisable' because it simply does not fit into any of our available categories. At that point we don't just seek to recognise what is different in our midst, but also aim to create a new image of this reality. Forensic recognition encourages understanding through comparison. It struggled to identify the form of emergent cultural differences because it relied on a fixed code of existing differences. It can only accommodate a difference if it has already secured a prior place within the spectrum of the national imaginary. As Paul Gilroy has argued, this vision of multiculturalism has failed:

> Rather than seeking to cater politically for each group through mastery of the sorts of cultural things that ought to correspond to its particularity, and then using that fidelity to secure affiliations to the larger national 'community', there must be recognition that diversity means more than just feeding and reproducing the particularity of groups imagined by either community-leaders in the hope that their ritual formal inclusion will generate reciprocal gestures.[18]

Another way of seeing through multiculturalism is necessary. Spherical learning stimulates the imagination. We can grasp foreign things by means of a forensic examination. This produces a

form of focus on the constituent parts and generates a comparative framework for seeing how they relate to the familiar. It is from our imagination that creativity erupts. This is the capacity to discover something new, to bear witness to that which is emergent and does not fit into any of the available categories and frameworks. The future of multiculturalism is bleak. It may be yet another public institution that is cut off and left to die, or else we might come to the view that multiculturalism is the basis for an 'open-source' conviviality that keeps us from eating each other.

Endnotes

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