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Dissolving the Diaspora: Dialogical Practice in the Development of Deep Multiculturalism

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ABSTRACT

This article is an exposition of deep or critical multiculturalism that is grounded in a mutually respectful dialogue. Such multiculturalism names historical oppressions, recognizes the structural causes of injustice and inequality, and is profoundly open to cultural critique, challenge and change. In order to promote such a multicultural practice, the article makes the case for a dialogical politics of deep and mutual respect in which ethno-religious sensibilities are validated and welcomed in their rich diversity. In doing so, the article draws upon the author's empirical research on the Muslim minority in contemporary Canada. Copyright © 2008 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: multiculturalism; dialogue; diaspora; Canada; citizenship

INTRODUCTION

Arguably the most urgent social psychological challenge of political societies in the contemporary West is that of accommodating ethno-religious diversities and dealing with more-or-less entrenched differences within the context of highly permeable states and liberal democratic political cultures. Three core terms implicated in this challenge have been those of diaspora, multiculturalism and dialogue. This article is grounded in a critical re-evaluation of these three inter-related concepts in order to better appreciate steps that might be taken to achieve well-functioning and unified political communities on the basis of a broad range of ethno-religious cultures, discourses, identities and sensibilities. Examples are drawn from a range of research projects related to the Muslim experience in Canada. The article begins with a brief critical appraisal of each of the three key concepts.

Diaspora, multiculturalism, dialogue

While the term *diaspora* is a useful one in describing characteristic patterns of global migration, it carries with it certain connotations that are no longer useful in the promotion of highly functioning multicultural societies. To a great extent, a member of a diasporic

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community is always an outsider, a representative of the Other, lacking in full citizenship and cultural immersion. To regard and to refer to ethno-racial and religious minorities in Canada as diasporas would be to privilege a certain reading of precedence of arrival in the geographical space of Canada that promotes an insider *versus* outsider hierarchical view of what constitutes a true Canadian. Moreover, among certain individuals and communities, an ascribed diasporic identity can exacerbate the continued existence of tensions and feuds originating in other parts of the world and resonating among those who have settled elsewhere. Technically, any immigrant community that has its origins elsewhere, and has scattered throughout the world, principally on the basis of 'push' factors constitutes a diaspora. With the notable exception of Canada's aboriginal peoples, all Canadians can be said to be the products of diasporic dispersals.

In a certain historically grounded and constitutionally limited sense, the two founding European nations of the French and the English can be said to have established the ground rules for the cultural, socio-economic and political character of contemporary Canada. However, acknowledging this should neither grant special privileges to those individuals of British or French heritage nor close the door on the further development of the Canadian society, economy and polity. To develop beyond a diasporic consciousness is to recognize and affirm the full and equal citizenship of those who have made a home in Canada. It is also to accelerate the process of integration grounded in full dignity, the security of an acknowledged, represented and understood past, and therefore, the promise of a common and welcome future as one political community.

To the extent that Canada works as a plural and diverse polity, it does so on the basis of a *multiculturalism* that carefully balances the core liberal democratic principles of individual rights and freedoms with an ongoing acknowledgment of the specific demands of communities and those social groups that emerge to represent them from time to time. In this way, ethno-cultural and religious sensibilities are protected to the extent that they are nurtured and promoted within communities, and to the limit that they do not compromise individual rights and freedoms. A deep or critical multiculturalism disavows ethnocentric or racist assimilation that overrides minority discourses or identities, but does not rest easy with an unexplored mode of integration into the existing host society that leaves unexplored those same minority discourses and identities. A critical approach to accommodation and integration requires a truly open receiving society to be prepared to question its own core values, its structured inequities, to acknowledge its own history and if necessary, to turn itself upside down. To do less is to blandly insist that newer immigrant communities must simply adapt and accept the *status quo ante* of the polity, culture and economy. In the case of Canada, as with the other western states, such socio-economic preconditions are Eurocentric, unable to recognize or unwilling to acknowledge structured inequality, and the deep historical roots of racism, exclusionary practices, xenophobia and colonialism. Social theorist Albert Hirschman (1970) first theorized the options for actors in organizations in decline. In brief, Hirschman argued that they could remain within the organization and simply accept any decline without comment or reaction (loyalty), they could remain within the organization and express their discontents (voice) or they could abandon the organization altogether (exit). Hirschman's model is applicable across a wide range of social settings including the choices facing ethno-religious minorities in a host polity that remains unable to or unwilling to adapt. With respect to the politics of multiculturalism, a deep multiculturalism (Fleras & Kunz, 2001; Henry, 2002) is a matter of the promotion of empowerment and the politics of voice, in contradistinction to the ultimately futile politics of loyalty or exit. A vibrant multiculturalism and the achievement

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of an adequately integrated political society depends upon the fullest and the frankest articulation of voices. If exit is a physical departure, of the kind favoured by those political actors who speak of repatriation or return to the homeland as a solution, loyalty entails the effective exit of cultural values that remain unexpressed, discourses that cannot enter the mainstream and consciousness that must necessarily remain split between the accommodative public self and the bracketed out personal doubts, frustrations and insecurities.

Deep multiculturalism avoids discourses of closure, finality and pre-emptive categorization, in which residual communities are either stereotyped by hegemonic forces in the larger society and/or represented in a partial and limited manner by official spokespersons from within designated communities. Instead, deep multiculturalism operates on the assumptions of the multiple and complex constitution of identities, their historical context, and their fragmented and contingent character. In this regard, deep multiculturalism places strong emphasis on the political efficacy of personal and group agency and the promotion of an insistent set of demands for consideration and voice. It is an approach that promotes, in the words of Frances Henry: '*empowerment* and *resistance* to forms of subjugation; the *politicization and mobilization* of marginalized groups; the *transformation* of social, cultural, and economic institutions, and the *dismantling* of dominant cultural hierarchies, structures, and systems of representation.' (Henry, 2002: 238)

This leads to a third contention. For a deep multiculturalism to contribute to the eradication of diasporic consciousness and discourse, there must be a practice of *dialogue* and it must meet certain requirements. In conformity with the now-familiar Habermasian principles, dialogue must be genuine and sincere and open to the possibility of change. It should be socially inclusive and equally open to all who are basically competent to speak and act, free with respect to the introduction of new ideas and the questioning of existing ones. Moreover, dialogue worthy of the name must be responsive to participants' sensibilities, and protective of their freedom from coercion both within the dialogical group and beyond it. For a well-functioning multicultural society, such dialogue needs to be found across a range of routine and special social settings in multiple networks of ongoing interaction. In plain terms, individuals and communities from across the society need to be consistently and habitually interacting. Conversely, citizens in general, and leaders in particular, need to be consistently aware of the dangers of group isolation and the retreat to community endogamy.

Muslims in Canada

With 579,640 self-reported adherents in 2001, (Canada, House of Commons, 2001; Statistics Canada, 2001) Muslims constitute the second-largest single religious affiliation in Canada and are increasingly interwoven into the political fabric of Canada. The close proximity of Canada to the USA in an era of homeland security, the war against terrorism and the invasion of Iraq, has conditioned a complex of actions and reactions. Both within the Muslim community and between that community and other Canadians, social relations and social representations have recently been undergoing profound reconfigurations, reflective of the ebbs and flows of global forces. A recent manifestation of these trends is the round up and arrest of 17 suspected terrorists, most of them Muslims, in the Toronto area on 2nd and 3rd June, 2006. This event, and the reaction to it, replicates patterns of response that have become typical in the recent past in Canada. Put briefly, a re-invigorated

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discourse of community dialogue and mutual respect across Canada's ethno-religious diversity has been countered by a small and yet growing anti-terrorist discourse of community mistrust and distantiation.

In my series of interviews with Canadian Muslim leaders and Muslim youth, I have heard powerful demands for community dialogue and political engagement. The responses of these interviewees express a sense of possibility and entitlement, mixed with a degree of cautiousness:

> . . . Canadians are very fair, open-minded people, and they want to learn. They do want to understand. It's [Islam] something different, something that they have not encountered before. . .. We're [Muslims] a part of this community. You know really it's a matter of geography. (Muslim male elected official)

> . . . they embrace the political process and become part of the democratic process. I think it is their incumbent duty that they [Muslims] take greater time and put greater resources both individually and as a people collectively in the Canadian democratic process. Because that's the only way not only they will be heard, but their concerns would then be reflected in the political system. (Muslim male political science professor)

> . . . one of the problems is that Muslims aren't involved in politics. So how can we say – how can we expect people to care about us, when we're not involved? I think we need to take, you know, a firm step towards being really involved. (Muslim woman student 1)

> . . . those people that do get the seats and do get the power. . . it's almost as if you're there so you know through *you* we can speak, through *you* we can speak, and through *you* people can hear our voices, and that's the way I think it should be done. (Muslim woman student 2)

Universalism and community endogamy

In a global context, responses towards assertive Muslim voices have been varied both within and beyond Muslim communities themselves. One tendency has been towards a radical assertion of a universalist will in which traces of ethno-religious particularisms are expunged. In its purest form, this is the response of the French Republican tradition of *läicité*. Under this tendency, any public or civic expression of religious belief is deemed unacceptable and in need of censorship or at least control. Individuals are expected to bracket out any religious basis for their engagement in public life. This universalistic approach may seem equitable, but it fails to account for the built-in advantages accruing to those communities whose religious sensibilities contribute to the already existing political culture. The West has emerged in the context of judeo-christianity, even if such a religious tradition has never been entirely homogeneous. Put bluntly, as Max Weber explained, liberalism is already a Protestant ideology, and cannot reasonably be described as lacking in a religious basis. A reasonable claim then is for Protestants (and, in the contemporary world, all Christians) to be joined by Muslims, Jews, Hindus and others in the making and re-making of a political culture. Moreover, far from enhancing secular democratic participation, the imposition of bland universalism may simply drive religious expressivity and practice in public life underground. The consequences of this may be to enhance covert and reactionary forms of particularism that are antithetical to the rights of full and democratic citizenship.

An alternative trend in the politics of religion has been the tendency of a certain strand of liberalism to subsume the rights claims of individuals under the internal governance of ascribed community identities. This has, until very recently, been the approach of the Dutch

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regime. Under such circumstances, the state or the polity recognizes discrete ethno-religious individuals and organizations that claim to speak on behalf of their members. While this approach can be said to be sensitive to community values, it is premised on a model of community endogamy and cohesion that is unviable in a late-modern global order. The very idea of exhibiting a community identity in a liberal polity is itself premised upon the possibility of an individual choice. As such it resists pre-emptive attempts at cultural and religious closure by spokespeople whose mode of selection and therefore representativeness remains uncertain. Those who claim to speak on behalf of a tradition, a religion or a culture do so in the context of an increasingly polyvocal and pluralistic world in which there is a growing insistence on intellectual freedom. As Castells (1997) has pointed out, this is one reason why fundamentalisms are for now at least erupting in panic reaction and seeking to close down the ambivalences of late-modern cultures.

The retreat to fundamentalism is an attempt to resolve the complexities of late modernity and the dangers associated with freedom and openness by recourse to monocausal explanations, rigid interpretations and literalist readings of selected texts. To promote fundamentalism is to meet risk, uncertainty and openness with a panic retreat into security and fixed propriety. It is to close the door on history, analytical enquiry and intellectual playfulness. Those who practice fundamentalism benefit from the—at least temporary—security of a set of fixed roles, positions and answers to difficult questions. Those assuming the right to interpret the sacred texts impose a rigidly ahistorical reading and in so doing insist that there is only one true path. Those who follow abnegate their own freedom and in so doing release themselves from the burdens of decision, choice and risk. Those well-intentioned liberal regimes that recognize fundamentalist leaders as the legitimate representatives of specific communities unwittingly contribute to the perpetuation of fundamentalist orders. Some of these are relatively benign, while others promote forms of oppression that are in fact antithetical to core liberal ideals and contradict liberal values. The Salafist mosques of the Netherlands have varied in their support for anti-liberal and anti-western messages. However, it is now evident, according to the Dutch government website (Netherlands, 2006) that external pressure has resulted in some moderation. In light of the recent arrests of the 17 suspected terrorists in Toronto, many prominent Muslims in Canada, among them Shahina Siddiqui, President of the Islamic Social Services Association, Tareq Fateh of the Muslim Canadian Congress, and Mohamed Elmasry, President of the Canadian Islamic Congress, have called for a more robust and active intervention from Muslim parents, educators and community leaders to counteract the spread of fundamentalist exclusionism in which the seeds of political extremism and terrorism can be incubated.

Canadian multiculturalism

As it has been evolving over the past four decades, Canadian public policy represents a finely tuned balance between universalistic individual rights and the needs and requirements of defined communities. The necessity to attend to the needs of established national communities within Canada as well as an increasingly diverse range of ethnic groups, enhanced through immigration, has resulted in a series of important constitutional and institutional attempts to reconcile communitarian and individual aspirations. The federal Official Languages Act, the Multiculturalism Act and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in addition to human rights legislation at the provincial level, are examples of these moves.

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The ideological moorings of Canadian public policy are firmly those of liberal pluralism. As such, the deeper requirements of critical multiculturalism remain only partially acknowledged. Nonetheless, there is no direct incompatibility between the framework of possibility established in the Canadian states and their legislation and the requirements of a dynamic discourse of an engaged citizenship.

The common thread of success in establishing and promoting ethno-religious harmony in Canada has been the willingness of substantial numbers of Canadians to engage in the daily hard work of sustaining respectful and caring dialogue. On this basis, public decisions that have been made have been grounded in a fundamental sense of legitimacy and of having been heard. At the policy level, recent instances of such decisions include the Canadian government's formal apology and compensation to Chinese Canadians for having imposed a racist and punitive head tax in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the decision to hold a public enquiry into the bombing of the Air India flight in the mid-1980s, repeated public affirmations of the multicultural and multiracial character of Canada, provincial decisions over Islamic law and the public enquiry into the deportation of Canadian Muslim Maher Arar. Even when some Canadians have disagreed with a public policy direction, the opportunity for meaningful and genuine dialogue and inclusiveness has ensured that most Canadians can live with the results. Such accord is no mere superficial gloss or nicety. It requires sustained attention and commitment and a determined vigilance from all actors. Each of those prominent Muslims in London, Ontario, who I have engaged in dialogue, has made specific and repeated reference to the importance of interpersonal and inter-community dialogue. Two matters stand out particularly in this regard for these Muslims. First, the importance of community dialogue immediately following the events of 9/11 in which it became a matter of urgency for non-Muslim Canadians to understand at least the rudiments of Islam, and, second, the ongoing right and responsibility for Muslims to be engaged in the civic culture and the political process as full citizens. The core of this ongoing dialogue has been a sense of common citizenship and entitlement to genuine inclusion. In the world of nations, this is a rare achievement and too often states have depended on either a rigid universalism or a residual and lazy communitarianism that permits fundamentalist absolutism.

I have been concerned to assess the extent to which Muslims and others in Canada have been able to achieve the politics of balance and mutuality that facilitates a viable and dynamic multiculturalism. In terms of Muslim political identities, this means those identities that are stimulated and achieved among Muslims themselves and those that are ascribed and attributed from the larger community. The interaction of these strands of identity is of critical importance in the life of the polity. Either extreme of failure to acknowledge and respect Islam, on the one hand, or of relegating the public dialogue over Islam to a few self-selected Imams, on the other hand, is likely to lead to growing rifts between substantial Muslim minorities and the larger society. Ethno-religious and racial hostilities are then much more likely as groups of stigmatized or isolated Muslims retreat to whatever form of community development and self-expression that is available to them. It is of critical importance then that serious and sustained dialogue is continued between Muslims and other communities in any evolution of public policy.

The basis of a critical and coherent theoretical orientation towards the place of Muslims in the contemporary Canadian polity can only begin with a genuine openness to Islam as a religion. This requires a cognitive and affective engagement that transcends the diffidence of mere tolerance. No idle adherence to 'the separation of church and state' can diminish the right of Muslims as well as Christians, Jews, and peoples of other faiths to be guided

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and shaped in the entirety of their lives through a religious devotion. Tariq Ramadan insists that young Muslims in the West take pride in knowing and understanding their religion and in making non-Muslims in the West pay attention. (Ramadan, 2004) Muslims as citizens have the right and the duty to make their Islamic voices heard and to be full participants in the democratic process. On the basis of core Muslim principles, which Ramadan argues Muslims share in common with peoples of all faiths, notably those of personal integrity, simplicity, modesty, communitarianism and generosity, Muslims should feel empowered to speak up in public debates over questions of politics, economy and society. As Saeed, Blain and Forbes (1999: 824) claim in the British context, British Pakistanis are entitled to contribute to a redefinition of what it means to be British.

A self-confident religious-based political identity is a refusal of ethno-racial marginalization from the majority population and yet also a rejection of mainstream and superficial assimilation into a culture fundamentally in need of re-evaluation. It is far from sufficient for non-Muslim Canadians in leadership positions to tolerate Islam by essentially relegating it to a marginal and invisible status. To do so not only encourages the possibility that—to the extent that they exist—unacceptable practices will remain under the radar, but it also assumes smugly that the existing liberal political culture has nothing at all to learn from Islam. Those Muslims who wish to contribute to the work of political reform and transformation in the West are '. . . reclaiming the concept of *ijtihad*—''interpretation'' or ''independent judgement''—not as a special right of scholars but of all Muslims.' (Vertovec and Peach, 1997: 40) This personally and politically transformative work is evident among certain African American Muslims in the United States, Indian and Pakistani Muslims in the United Kingdom and young North Africans in France. While such civic engagement is perhaps encouraging in a liberal democratic society, it would be inappropriate to ignore the underpinnings of racism and cultural denigration against which such movements have struggled and the ever-present alternative for minority communities of ethno-religious departure, cold isolation and refusal to engage in the dominant society at all. The active and positive engagement of Muslim citizens in the public sphere cannot simply be taken for granted. Each of us needs to acknowledge the contingency and fragility of such involvement and the barriers that have already been overcome even to get to this dialogical stage.

No reckoning of the potential impact of Islam in the contemporary Canadian polity can overlook the matter of gender. The oppression of women in the world is—to state the obvious—widespread and there is clear evidence that women have been silenced, violated and humiliated in the name of most of the world's religions, Islam included. But it is critical here not to isolate Islam for unreasonable and irrational opprobrium. For instance, female genital cutting is practiced among all religions in those African societies in which it is experienced. Another way of exploring the connection between Islam and gender is through the powerful voice of controversial Canadian lesbian author and broadcaster Irshad Manji, who considers herself a Muslim. Manji responds eloquently to the claim that feminism and Islam do not belong together. She says: 'I am a Muslim Refusenik. That doesn't mean I refuse to be a Muslim; it simply means I refuse to join an army of automatons in the name of Allah.' (Manji, 2003: 3) Caliskan (2005: 5) writing of German-born Berliner women of Turkish origin identifies a core reality for Muslim women in Germany and other western countries. They are struggling towards identities that transcend and/or contradict how they have come to be constructed in the host society and among their Muslim male brothers, fathers and spouses. Such a path is never easy and Arat (1998: 130) speaks of how to '. . . resolve the issue of reconciling individualism with a holy communitarianism.' Withol de Werden regards Muslim women in France as particularly

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critical in finding compromises and bridges between traditional religious values and the realities of *laicité* and contemporary French society:

> The psychological, political, and cultural adjustments of young Muslim women in France are characterized by a great diversity of many persistent compromises. In all cultures, women habitually have to do more coping, and more compromising – but probably seldom as much as these Muslim women, who are both tradition-bearers and integration proponents, cultural and generational mediators. (Withol de Werden, 1998: 145)

The clearest symbol of how Muslim women have chosen to express their identity is manifest in the complex of personal, cultural, religious and political decisions rendered regarding the Muslim headscarf, hijab, niqab, burqa and other forms of head and face covering. A series of scholars, notably AlSayyad (2002), Arat (1998), Benhabib (2002), Kepel (1997) and Withol de Wenden (1998) has alerted us to the complexity of decoding what Muslim women's choices say about their identity. Whatever else might be said, the simple equation of headscarf with oppression is unsustainable. Such a message is clear in the words of those Muslim women interviewed in my project. My in-depth interviews with Canadian Muslims have generated findings that support a profound belief in community dialogue and civic engagement. This sense of involvement is grounded in a powerful sense of building a renewed Canada that pays attention to Muslim sensibilities. One woman, a graduate student of sociology puts the case eloquently: '. . . more than ever I think we need to integrate ourselves. I always say not integrate completely because we do have our values and we do have our cultural norms that we hold very dear. . . a middle ground of integration, kind of give and take.'

The voices of Canada's Muslims find sensitive reflection in Marion Boyd's review, *Dispute Resolution in Family Law: Protecting Choice, Promoting Inclusion*. (2004) Former provincial Attorney General Boyd offers a nuanced and balanced assertion of universal rights in the context of a polyethnic and multicultural society. The Ontario provincial government, faced with requests from certain members of the Muslim community to permit a measure of Islamic law to inform and guide family law arbitration, commissioned her Report. She wrote:

> . . . in a liberal democratic, multicultural society such as Canada. . . it is citizenship that allows membership in the minority community to take shape. As a result, the foremost political commitment of all citizens, particularly those who wish to identify at a cultural or religious level with a minority outside the mainstream, must be to respect the rights accorded to each one of us as individual Canadians. . .. It is illogical and untenable to claim minority rights in order then to entrench religious or cultural orthodoxies that seek to trample the individual rights of select others. Accommodation of cultural difference and respect for minorities should not extend this far. Rather, tolerance and accommodation must be balanced against a firm commitment to individual agency and autonomy. (Boyd, 2004: 92)

The Boyd Report came in for much criticism from conservatives, who attempted to deny the value of a politically mobilized and engaged Muslim community altogether. It was also the object of condemnation from progressives who feared that a naïve Ontario state would simply ignore or fail to appreciate the oppression of Muslim women that necessarily takes place if any elements of Islam are allowed to inform alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, notably arbitration. In her report, Boyd argued that no shutting down of the legal and public possibility of religious sensibility in matters of family dispute resolution would in fact rid the process of such considerations. Religious manipulation, to the extent that it existed, would be driven underground. This point was eloquently reinforced by the

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leading Canadian Muslim lawyer, Sheema Khan (2005). Moreover, the Muslim community in Canada would receive the message that their religiously informed pathways to justice were worth less than those of the Catholics and Anglicans who established Upper and Lower Canada and their cultures and jurisprudence.

In the end, the Ontario government decided to reject the Boyd Report, thereby closing down the area of arbitration in family law to any religious intervention. This action also removed Christian and Jewish participants, who had been engaged in this process for a decade. Confronted with opposition to the Boyd Report from a range of well-intentioned progressive groups, the Ontario government opted for a retreat into blunt universalism. In doing so, it attempted to protect Muslim women from their own communities. None of the young Muslim women I engaged in conversation, even those who counted themselves non-observant and non-traditional, would have supported this decision, which was rendered after the interviews took place. Their voices indicate that they would have regarded it as patronizing and presumptuous. Typical of these views is the following from a young woman in medical school: 'Many people see me and think I'm oppressed right off the bat, or think that I'm from another country, that I've moved here, just because I do wear the head scarf; that someone forced me to put it on, whether it be my father or my brother.' The Ontario government's decision did little to allay the fears of Muslims and other religious minority groups among new Canadians that their religious beliefs were, in fact, second-class (BBC, 2005).

CONCLUSION

According to Benhabib 'The negotiation of complex cultural dialogues in a global civilization is now our lot.' (Benhabib, 2002: 186) Benhabib does not specify the denotation of her penultimate word 'our'. In order to appreciate the emerging identities of Muslims in the West and their associated political claims, each of us, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, needs to be engaged. The 'we' that Benhabib implicates must be generalized and broadened. Anything less than widespread engagement falls short of developing just and rational societies grounded in the rule of law, a vibrant civil society, and pluralistic political discourse.

Charles Taylor knows that '... the withholding of recognition can be a form of oppression.' (Taylor, 1994, p. 36) The highest standards of political life demand that people's religious choices are recognized and accepted as fundamental belief systems that have guided them. If a political society is to be functional and viable, no one's traditional cultural norms should be devalued. At times, acceptance of the belief systems of others requires accommodation and compromise. This can stretch the limits of societal tolerance. As Benhabib puts it: '... we have to live with the otherness of others whose ways of being may be deeply threatening to our own.' (Benhabib, 2002, p. 130) Even so, denying the full expression of religious principles in their psychological, cultural and even ideological expression is an intolerable oppression in any society that claims to be free. At the same time, superficially accepting each espoused belief and value as equally worthy is insincere. There is a deep ethnocentrism in simply accepting a minority religious viewpoint without scrutiny as of 'equal worth.' Until and unless its values are explored, contested and debated, there can be nothing more than a fragile and contingent tolerance.

The balances that emerge in mutually respectful dialogue are evidenced in the best of Canadian practices. Accepting Islam in its fullness and rich diversity and recognizing

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Muslims as full Canadian citizens is an important part of the equation. So too is the respectful and conviction-based dialogue of viewpoints and values. Where dialogue meets these standards, as it often does according to my research, the direction is appropriate. Where the focus is on negativity and division, however, it sows the seeds of community isolationism and social as well as individual fragmentation. Clearly, we in Canada have some way to go in eradicating the priming of negativity in discourses surrounding Islam and Muslims. But evidence of the delicate and careful sense of balance that I am espousing is clear in the recent editorial treatment of the Danish cartoon controversy in Canada. While a small minority of maverick individuals gleefully reproduced the cartoons in the name of free speech (Levant, 2006) most mainstream editorial positions stressed community dialogue, respect and social responsibility and did not aggravate the existing pain of Muslims in Canada by gratuitously reproducing the cartoons (Berton, 2006; Greenspon, 2006).

As I have argued, sensitivity to the multicultural mosaic does not imply the abandonment of core enlightenment values. In the words of Charles Taylor (1994, p. 62), liberalism is a fighting creed. In the context of a sincere commitment to the core principles of critical multiculturalism in which historical contexts and structured inequities are taken into account in the deepest assertion of political voice, there nonetheless remain some universal principles that are justifiably asserted and enforced. Among those set out in the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration are the core human rights associated with freedom from physical and psychological coercion and destruction. Of course, philosophers can argue the limits of such matters and exceptions to rules, but the malicious and intentional violation of core human rights is contrary to the broad ethics of humanity itself and must be condemned, irrespective of any cultural relativism. While it is mistaken and ethically unsound to isolate, denigrate and stereotype Muslims and Islam, it is not wrong to differentiate between acts that attempt to bolster human development and those that would destroy it. It is therefore, legitimate to discriminate positively in favour of the huge majority of Muslims who seek to live in peace and against that minority that conspire to promote the destruction of innocent lives. To argue this is not to buy into any paternalistic oppression of Muslims and Islam, even if it is ultimately to take sides. It is to assert a limited set of basic procedural values associated with modernity, those of the rule of law, basic human rights, liberty, equality, respect for each other and solidarity.

The grounds for the full expression of identities in an adequate deliberative democracy include equal legal, civil, political, economic and cultural rights, voluntary self-ascription to groups and communities and freedom of exit from groups and communities. To the extent that those engaged in debate are authentically and freely able to participate, dialogue should be encouraged and each of us must adopt some of the civic responsibility for it. Ramadan writes of the work that must be undertaken by Muslims. He says: '. . . Western Muslims will bear a heavy responsibility for demanding that the debate be opened and that it be conducted at a serious and deep level that requires listening to and exchanging with their fellow-citizens.' (Ramadan, 2004, p. 226) However, the ongoing tasks of reconciling modern principles of liberal individualism with pre-modern communitarian religious norms in a late modern global order are the responsibility of all. More recently, Ramadan has written of that 'We are in dire need of mutual trust.' (Ramadan, 2006) I take it as my responsibility as a non-Muslim to be an active bridge builder.

John Stuart Mill understood well that a vibrant and fully democratic society depends on constant and deep dialogue in which there is a possibility that each of us, minority and majority alike, can transform each other. An orientation of indifference furthermore evades those moments when fundamental individual and group rights and freedoms come up

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against some version of the traditional values of a religious community. In a democratic society, specifically a liberal democratic society, no statement of religious principles can trump the basic rights and freedoms that are guaranteed to individuals and there can be no 'safe havens' in which religions can claim a sanctuary in which to restrict and oppress their own members. There is no adequate reason why a fully developed and rich Islamic identity must be incompatible with the universal liberal rights of a western polity. As AlSayyad puts it: '... Euro-Islam is compatible with liberal democracy, individual rights, and civil society.' (AlSayyad 2002, p. 19; see also Ramadan, 2004, p. 216) There is indeed nothing complete and final about western political culture and political institutions, and Muslims engaged as full and active members of European and North American countries through their religious sensibilities can contribute powerfully to the betterment of these nations and states.

There has been a strong tendency on the part of certain polities and states to attempt to assimilate, co-opt, corral, ignore or limit Muslim political identities. While understandable as a reaction against fundamentalist excesses, such tendencies are ultimately counter productive. They lead to emotional exit of thousands and millions of western Muslims and to their political disengagement. In the end, ironically, such attempts to crush Muslim fundamentalisms actually serve to promote them. Such moves also weaken the fabric of western societies by leaving them unaffected by the serious critiques, deep wisdoms and alternative visions that come from the Islamic tradition. Most importantly perhaps, for pragmatists, it is only through the most open and free expression of one's religious principles and their most generalized acceptance that those religious principles themselves can bear scrutiny and critique and thereby undergo transformation and evolution into whatever they might become through the work of constant dialogical review and revision. In any society that hopes to achieve ethno-religious harmony, citizens have a role to play in reflecting a free and yet responsible search for truth and meaning.

The very possibility of late modernity can only be understood through the transformation of Christianity through the reformation and the enlightenment. That transformation gave rise to forms of religious conflict and bloodshed that are still with us. Whatever else can be said of the denominations and sects to have emerged from this long process of transformation, they are now more or less compatible with the precepts of universal human rights. At the very least the centrality of these religions to Western cultures has facilitated an ongoing dialogue in which mutual trust can be grounded and built upon, even in the face of disagreement. That privileged place needs to be expanded in the fullest sense to all ethno-religious traditions, including the Islamic tradition, in order to facilitate a good enough basis for a coherent if diverse and internally dynamic political community of the future.

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