



# BULLETIN

Centre for the Study of Democracy  
Autumn 1996, volume 4, number 1

## Multiculturalism and Democracy

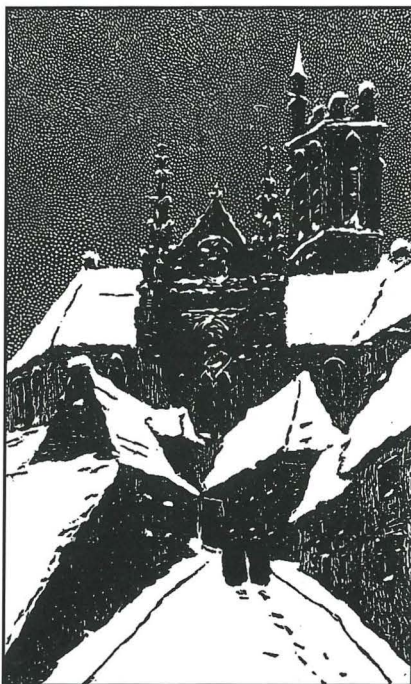
by Graeme Duncan

Multiculturalism can be presented as a form of pluralism, in that it affirms the existence and legitimacy of manifold cultures, which are not to be eradicated or reduced to quaint survivals of other worlds, into mere ceremonial. As a positive doctrine, multiculturalism asserts the richness of a society containing different real cultures which have not had the meaning squeezed out of them in pursuit of stability or uniformity.

This raises the question of the ways in which particular groups should be recognised and supported, a question which has become crucial in recent theorising about democracy. Ann Phillips raises it in her book *Democracy and Difference*, when she considers the claims of Iris Marion Young that we need to look at group identity and representation in order to create a politics which recognises heterogeneity and difference and, more substantially, disadvantage and oppression. Homogeneity and a common conception of citizenship easily become pacifying myths, as Marcuse argued a generation ago in *One Dimensional Man*. Young wants to institutionalise the representation of hitherto suppressed groups, through public funding, policy generation and veto powers over legislation of particular relevance to themselves. Her list of suppressed

groups - in the United States - indicates the difficulties facing her argument: the list includes 'women, blacks, Native Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans and other Spanish-speaking Americans, Asian Americans, gay men, working class people, poor people, old people, and mentally and physically disabled people'.

As it stands, the proposal is a radical and impossible one. It is not



clear how a particular category (hardly group) qualified for inclusion on the list, or how one would define the relevant constituency or a proper system of internal accountability. Would the Vietnamese be included here, but not the Dutch or the Germans, who vanish more easily into the host community? Multicultural leaders may 'represent' a very small part of possible members of their

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community. The units themselves need to meet criteria of openness and representativeness. Therefore, while some kind of structural pluralism seems necessary to guarantee political access, the representative forms within the minority community themselves require evaluation.

Fundamental questions emerge as we try to conceptualise the proper relationships between the smaller communities and the larger society. One, a tradition liberal problem, that of the relationship between diversity and unity, has two sides - how much diversity should be allowed to ethnic groups, and how much control - needs to be imposed upon criticism of such groups and their practices. A liberal society both allows and encourages diversity, and controls it in some areas, and the point at which liberal tolerance starts and ends is naturally a deeply contentious issue. Must limits of some kind be imposed upon potential diversity if the larger unit is to survive in sufficient



harmony and with due respect for its core values, whatever these may be? It is a problem raised by Rousseau both in his discussion of particular interests and the general good, and of our inability to serve two masters.

It thus leads into the problem of citizenship and loyalty, and may produce some such anodyne recommendation as that multiculturalism is good insofar as it does not separate individuals from the larger society, which must remain the object of their highest loyalty, or some abstract conception of universal citizenship, divorced from the unevennesses and the diverse traditions and practices of our own society. What is the nature of citizenship in an ethnically heterogeneous society? Is abstract citizenship the answer, or does the notion of citizenship require development in a more flexible and open way?

To take my own country, Australia, as an example: the first and essential issue is how the process of incorporating minority values, and the possible adjustment of core values (English institutions and values), should be conceived in Australian democracy. It cannot and should not be one-way traffic. But what is the give and what is the take? Some elements of cultural uniformity, which may be seen as cultural imposition, are needed.

First, children from ethnic minorities have a right to be taught about Australian core values and history, which is a condition of participation and perhaps success in the larger society. Such an education would be ideally both solid and critical, bringing out the different strands of UK (or Australian) culture. For these are internally complex bodies of beliefs, values and practices, which can be construed in a relatively straightforward way but which also provide a basis for criticism of the core structure and for diverse interpretations of it. In multicultural societies core values must be recognised and examined, known but not simply received.

Next, some practices and

pleasures which are acceptable in minority cultures may be unacceptable to the whole, for example, infibulation or cock-fighting or political vendettas. Sometimes the case for upholding traditional claims against state laws may seem very strong, as has been asserted in relation to Indian rights and traditions in Canada and the United States. But whilst it may be morally appealing to push the 'health of historic communities' against formal equality in a legal sense, it is also true that practices and relationships acceptable to minorities may be deeply offensive in terms of core values, for example, they may involve significant injustice or malpractice to women and children. And a legal system which took on board the legal and moral traditions of all of its citizens would be complex to the point of unmanageability.

Such considerations suggest that the maintenance and enrichment of a multicultural society is very difficult. It requires toleration, though not in a limp or merely formal sense - on the one side it may involve intolerance of unacceptable minority practices and on the other anti-racist and other measures to protect minorities. There is no abstract answer because cultures are asserted in a variety of ways, from violent conflict to creative diversity. The conceptual issue is that of defining sustainable and desirable heterogeneity. Integration is an advance on assimilation, which is itself an advance on genocide, but the demands of helping to develop processes and relationships between the larger community and its parts which are creatively interactive, not hierarchical or emptily formal, respecting the various components while subjecting them to critical appraisal, is hard, both imaginatively and practically.

We can hardly leave core values unchallenged, being as they are the historical product primarily of a small portion of the society - white, middle-aged, propertied men, by and large. The

meaning of the necessary change and exchange, which leaves none of the parties the same, needs continuing exploration.

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Unresolved Issues in the Theory of Democratisation.

*Professor Jacqueline Peschard:*  
Democracy and Governability in Mexico.

*Professor Michael Cox:* American Foreign Policy in the 1990s.

### November

*Dr Chris Smith:* Small Arms Trafficking: A New International Phenomenon.

*Dr Charles Jones:* E. H. Carr on Democracy and Security.

*Professor Barry Buzan:*

**CSD Inaugural Lecture:** Where we are at the End of the Second Millennium: A View from International Studies.

### December

*Professor Edmund Byrne:*  
Rethinking Business Ethics.

### January/February

*Niels Jacob Harbitz:* Marshall McLuhan's Method.

*Professor Milan Podunavac:*  
Fear and Politics.

*Professor Zygmunt Bauman:*  
Freedom, Poverty, and Poverty of Freedom.

*Dr Judith Squires:*  
Deliberative Democracy and Aestheticised Politics.

*Professor Elizabeth Meehan:*  
Integration and Citizens' Rights: A Comparative Perspective.

*Chantal Mouffe:* Carl Schmitt and the Paradoxes of Democracy.

*John Keane:* The Power of the Powerless.