Mapping the Limits of Multiculturalism in the Context of Globalization

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This article explores the limits of multiculturalism as a concept and logic for addressing cultural inequalities. It argues that engagements with multiculturalism in Anglo-American national cultures in the West tend to be nation-bound. Thus, multiculturalism remains inadequate to map and address relations of cultural otherness that are produced by the complexities of transnationalism that exceed the nation. As well, in its grounding in Westphalian liberal assumptions of democracy, the concept and practice of multiculturalism remain insufficient as a lens through which to comprehend logics of cultural inequalities in non-Western modernities. The goal of the paper is to map the limits of our engagement with multiculturalism in the face of both globalization and the logics of non-Western modernities.

Multiculturalism has constituted an important area of scholarship in communication studies (in the Western academy) in the last two decades.[2] Focusing on struggles over culture, race, and identity, communications research has foregrounded the importance of multiculturalism as an urgent topic of inquiry for our times. In this article, while honoring the important work that has been done on

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[2] Instead of citing specific works, I want to note some scholars here. Scholars such as Ien Ang, Kent Ono, Richard Dyer, Soyini Madison, Angharad Valdivia, Ralina Joseph Catherine Squires, Radhika Parameswaran, Robin Coleman, Lisa Nakamura, Carol Stabile, Jacqueline Bobo, Arlene Davila, and Mary Beltran, among several others, have made important contributions in this area of communications research. The author also thanks the anonymous *IJoC* reviewers for their helpful suggestions to improve this paper.

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Date submitted: 2011–03–28

multiculturalism and race in our field, I argue that the conceptual logics and frameworks informing our engagements with multiculturalism (both in scholarship and public discourse) often remain situated within a nation-centered ethos of citizenship, justice, rights, and identity, and also in West centric assumptions about "freedom," "belonging," and "democracy."[3] As Ang argues, "[I]t is unfortunate that most writers still take Western industrialised societies as the privileged point of entry to discussions related to multiculturalism, citizenship and democracy" (2010, p. 4). The result is that our conceptual frameworks around cultural justice in the Anglo-American academy frequently prevent us from connecting to modes of otherness that exceed the nation, or that exceed the logics of democracy and belonging in Anglo/European modernities.[4]

In a transnationally connected world, categories of culture collide in messy ways. The globalization of media, capital, and culture, and the assertion of multiple non-Western modernities are producing new and complex subject positions of belonging (consider, for example, the increase in dual citizenship across very different national modernities). What Scott (1999) calls the "problem-space" of culture acquires new significance in a world of connected and colliding modernities, where what happens "elsewhere" impacts the "here" (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Hall, 1996), and where the "elsewhere" and "here" are not always geographically where we think they are. To fully grasp the logics of cultural tensions and struggles in such shifting landscapes requires a re-examination of the tendencies through which we theorize cultural equalities, and especially the North Atlantic logics of those tendencies. Many of those logics were outcomes of racial struggles of the 1960s and 1970s in nations such as the United States and the UK. Further, multiculturalism today, in its reification of cultural difference (Grossberg, 1993; Moreiras, 2001; Shome, 2003) is often engaged with in public culture through thick and preconstructed signifiers of ethnicity that frequently function in the service of a "neo-liberal multiculturalism" (Giroux, 2008; Goldberg, 2007; Melamed, 2006).

Such issues invite us to reflect on these kinds of questions: Are the logics of multiculturalism that we resort to in nations such as the United States (or the UK or Canada) able to sufficiently articulate transnational frames needed to comprehend cultural exclusions that exist in other modernities, or that result from collisions of multiple (but unequal) modernities?[5] In what ways do discourses of multiculturalism in nations such as the United States—and, broadly, all Anglo-American nations—that pride themselves on being multicultural democracies end up being alibis for a logic of exceptionalism in relation to many non-Western contexts ("We are a pluralistic tolerant society; you are not")? Can our

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[3] Kymlicka's (1996) liberal theory of "multicultural citizenship," which has been influential, is a case in point.

[4] Pieterse (2007) is another scholar who has expressed discomfort with nation-based frameworks of multiculturalism and posited, instead, the concept of "global multiculture." While I share his former discomfort, as the rest of this article suggests, I do not think the concept of global multiculture is necessarily productive, as the term "multiculture" itself is so saturated with West-centric liberal assumptions of multiculturalism.

[5] I refer to the United States, UK, and Canada because, in the North Atlantic Western spheres, these are the nations that most visibly present themselves as being successfully multicultural.

theoretical concepts around multiculturalism speak to what Hage calls the "ungovernable" intercultural and transnational relations that interrupt nation-based "multicultural governmentality?" (2010, p. 235). In sum, are our engagements with multiculturalism (and its corresponding concepts, such as cultural identity and cultural difference) able to capture relations of cultural inequalities in other worlds that fall outside North Atlantic frames of equality, justice, and democracy?

Communication is central to such reconsiderations. Virtual and mediated frontiers increasingly result in new connections and disconnections that produce new kinds of subject positions. The globalization of technology and media also result in new forms of migrations, located at the nexuses of multiple modernities challenging nation-bound categories of "difference." With the rise of contemporary Asian modernities, new (or at least hitherto unseen by us in the West) relations of population management that exceed our North Atlantic liberal assumptions of what constitutes "the people" are emerging. Mediascapes in many nations in Asia, as well as in the Global South broadly, are forging new representations of culture and belonging whose vocabularies cannot be grasped through bounded West-centric frames of culture, identity, and belonging. Today, in a nation such as China, for instance, authoritarianism and global capitalism exist side by side. In Singapore, to which I refer later, cultural pluralism is so institutionalized that a larger homogeneous sense of national belonging is discouraged (thus contradicting the influential communication concept of the nation as an "imagined community" residing in *homogenous* time, proposed by Anderson [1983]). In a city-state such as Dubai, cosmopolitanism—a concept celebrated in global communication studies—is so successful that it invites us to recognize that there is no necessary correlation between cosmopolitanism and democracy. New forms of cultural pluralism in non-Western modernities that have their own rationalities invite us to consider what new kinds of communicative relations are emerging that defy our available North Atlantic vocabularies for thinking of "difference." Given that multiculturalism is a predominant logic through which communicative relations of difference have been studied in the West, it thus becomes important to map the limits of this multiculturalism to expand our political imaginations in ways that are globally responsive and responsible.

So, in what follows, I discuss some conceptual logics that undergird our engagements with multiculturalism in the West, especially in the United States, to call attention to their nation-centered limits for capturing complexities of transnational otherness that fall outside of the frames of North Atlantic modernities. Additionally, I attempt to denaturalize the often taken-for-granted equation between multiculturalism and cultural inclusion/sensitivity that exists in our public and academic imaginations. The goal of this article is to invite a reflection of our conceptual categories around race, cultural justice, and inclusion in the context of a *critical* transnationality that recognizes the need to contain the universalizing impulses of cultural theories in the West, and that also understands that many forms of cultural exclusions are being engendered in our current transnational moment that cannot be adequately comprehended by the notions of multicultural *recognition* (as in Honneth, 1992, 1995; Taylor, 1994) that are normalized in our scholarly vocabularies in the North Atlantic West.[6] Recognition already presupposes an *a priori*

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[6] Nancy Fraser (1995, 2000), of course, is widely known for her discussion of the limits of recognition and the need to focus on redistribution. See also Anne Philips (1999). My critique, however, engages in a discussion of multiculturalism through the complexities of transnationalism.

existence of norms through which we "recognize" and, hence, name someone as excluded, minority, and Other (Butler, 2009).[7] I should mention here that my issue is less with multiculturalism in the abstract; it is more with how multiculturalism tends to be *conceived* of in public and academic culture that then also informs its practices in numerous institutionalized ways.

My arguments proceed in the following manner. I first discuss the limits of the cultural identity logic that underpins many of our discussions of multiculturalism. Second, focusing on the United States in particular, I address how multiculturalism often ends up functioning as a signifier of Western nations' self-proclaimed exceptionalism and progress. Finally, I illustrate how, in many global/non-Western contexts— such as those in Asia—the politics of cultural diversity are so different that not only do our universalized logics of multiculturalism not work in those contexts, but multiculturalism, instead of functioning as a framework for inclusion, often functions as an official, national, and institutional tool for producing and suppressing inequality. Thus, there is no necessary correlation between multiculturalism and serious cultural inclusion/sensitivity.

Unsettling the Primacy of Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is a primary concept that has informed most discussions of race and multiculturalism. Arguing that racial minorities have a cultural identity that is not only different from, but also historically "othered" by dominant cultures, scholars and advocates of multiculturalism have argued for the recognition of the identity of marginalized groups that, thus far, have been historically marginalized in our national communities in the West. Such work has also been established in communication studies.[8] Whether critiquing social discourses for their problematic constructions of marginalized identities; focusing on how marginalized groups construct their own identities in relation to dominant cultures; pointing to the emergence of in-between hybrid identities; examining how identities are constituted by intersecting relations of gender, race, sexuality, class, nationality, or ability; or addressing how dominant cultures construct and represent their own identities as sites of "normalcy" (as in whiteness studies), cultural identity has been a dominant focus in communication scholarship on multiculturalism.

Although explorations of cultural identity have been important in critical race studies broadly, I suggest that a singular focus on cultural identity is not always productive or beneficial when we reconsider and replace the concept of cultural identity in the context of both divergent (and convergent) relations of transnationalities and the multiple and contending relations of modernities that crisscross our ever-shifting frontiers of belonging.

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[7] The Chicago critical multiculturalism group of the mid-1990s made a similar argument about "critical internationalism" in engagement with multiculturalism. See Lee (1995) on this matter. However, while some of the impulses of their arguments are in this article as well, this essay, first and foremost, calls attention to the very efficacy of the concept of multiculturalism in our times; it does not call for "internationalizing" the concept of multiculturalism.

[8] I refer readers to some of the scholars cited in footnote 1.

In recent years, scholars from various disciplinary perspectives have critiqued the singular focus on cultural identity for the political stasis that over-attention to it can generate (for example, see Brown, 1995; Butler, 2009; Fraser, 2000; Gitlin; 1996; Grossberg, 1993; Karim, 2006; Moreiras, 2001; Ong, 2003; Shome, 2003; and Spivak, 2009, among others). Although these critiques have yielded many debates about the efficacy of identity politics, most of these discussions have remained focused on North Atlantic national cultures (for an exception, see Spivak, 2009). Scholars have not sufficiently addressed the limits of the concept of cultural identity in relation to the challenges posed by transnationality and its global flows, ruptures, and inadequacies.[9] Additionally, there has been little evaluation of whether the concept of cultural identity is politically effective in contexts outside Anglo-American temporalities. Without suggesting that the cultural identity concept has no political purchase, this section is concerned with underscoring the limits of the logic of cultural identity when we attempt to move culture and communication studies into a transnational framework and the realities of non-Western modernities.

For communication scholars, the matter of rethinking the limits of multiculturalism and its primary critical category—cultural identity—in the context of globalization is important, as it underscores the need for what Thussu has called "internationalizing communication studies" (2009, p. 1), although the term transnational tends to be preferable to the term international, as the latter term is saturated with post–World War II connotations and still sees nations as bounded units.

We no longer live in a world (not that we ever did, but today, we cannot even avoid the matter) where we can turn a blind eye to how cultural logics work in other modernities, including how those logics interrupt ours. We do not live in a world where we can assume that our liberal Western assumptions about multiculturalism as a human rights/civil rights matter necessarily contain the political resources to interpret cultural relations and violations in other contexts. Increasingly, our mediated lives—and the mediation of our lives, through which we experience the world—make it difficult to even *conceive* of populations and subjects that fall outside our codes of representation in Anglo-American contexts. This makes it imperative that we try to move beyond our codes of representation in the West and attempt to access other codes through which other modernities manage cultural relations of inequality. This is important if we are to expand our political imaginations about different and hitherto-unrecognized possibilities of cultural justice.

I realize that a reader might, at this point, ask,

Can we not still conceive of multiculturalism in ways that are not saturated with Western liberal assumptions? Isn't there a way to unhinge multiculturalism—as an

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[9] Fraser's recent work (2010) has begun moving in this direction. Fraser revamps her earlier discussions of politics of recognition and politics of distribution by now arguing for the importance of reframing the concept of justice in light of a transnational public sphere. This important work, while addressing deficits in the identity concept, does not focus *specifically* on claims of *cultural identity* in relation to the multicultural paradigm in the context of transnationality. Much of the impulse remains around the broader notion of justice in transnationality and the subject of justice. On this subject, see also Asad's work in general.

epistemological framework, as well as a cultural practice/policy—from its liberal roots
and tendencies?

It is true that Western liberalism does not necessarily have to shape or exhaust our conceptions and practices of multiculturalism. But, as Madood rightly reminds us, the fact is that "multiculturalism presupposes the principles, norms, and institutions of liberal democracies . . . [M]ulticulturalism could not get off the ground if it totally repudiated liberalism" (2007, p. 7). Postcolonial anthropologist David Scott (1999) reminds us that, in cultural theory, we often forget that the moment of normalization of a framework is also the moment when we need to stop looking for answers to the questions that gave rise to the framework. Rather, we need to revisit the questions in the first place to see whether they are still valid today, whether the political impetus behind them is still timely and relevant, and whether the "problem-space[s]" (ibid., p. 9) that they sought to address are necessarily the problem spaces of today. Multiculturalism, for instance, came about in Western nations as a nation-based policy or framework for managing and redressing inequalities within a national polity. It came about as a response to racial inequalities produced by North Atlantic slavery, the annihilation of indigenous populations, and postcolonial migrations into the West. But today, the challenge is to consider whether this problem space of multiculturalism is the same as the problem space(s) produced by new forms and disjunctures of transnational relations, as well as by new assertions of modernities that go beyond nation-bound limits of multiculturalism. In an effort to think about cultural otherness in the context of the global, I now specifically probe the limits of the cultural identity model in our engagements with multiculturalism.

One problem is this: When geopolitical equations change in a given moment and new economic/cultural realignments in contemporary globalization result in differential managements and regulations of populations within the same cultural identity, how do you theorize inequities solely around the axis of cultural identity? Expatriate populations bring in highly skilled expertise (technology, information management, finance management) and can easily cross many national borders. They are compensated well within the economic structures of the nations in which they reside; they have access to spaces of privilege and recognition. Yet particular populations within that same cultural group may be positioned or managed very differently, or simply rendered into nonrecognition by the nation in terms of rights and belonging, revealing what Ong (2006) calls a "graduated" politics of population management that characterizes the neoliberal logics of nation states. Ong argues that, today, governments "adjust political space to dictates of global capital," resulting in a differential management of sovereignty and differential exercise of the power of sovereignty in relation to populations (including populations within the same cultural group) "that are differently [and unequally] articulated to global production and financial circuits" (ibid., p. 78).

For instance, today, South Asian (especially Indian) high-tech and finance workers constitute a mobile regime of highly skilled expatriate talent in many nations, especially the United States. Given the value of high-tech workers and their expertise to global capital and its informational economy, they are often subject to privileged modes of management and mobility by the nation state (quick visas, quick green cards or resident permits, tremendous financial compensation, and the like). In the United States, for example, Indians have become very visible. PepsiCo is headed by Indra Nooyi; CitiBank is headed by the recently appointed Vikram Pandit; Anshu Jain heads the global markets of Deutsche Bank groups in

New York; Vijay Singh is one of the top golfers in the world; President Obama's chief IT advisor is Indian; Sabeer Bhatia cofounded Hotmail in 1996 after landing in the United States and later sold it to Microsoft for $400 million; Shantanu Narayen is CEO of Adobe Systems; and Rono Dutta was appointed president of United Airlines. In medicine, engineering, banking, politics, media, and entertainment, Indians have become visible—and some would say even hypervisible. In 1997, when Bill Gates—still heading Microsoft— went to India, he stated that South Indians are the second "smartest" people on earth (the first, apparently, being the Chinese). A 2004 *Newsweek* article on Indians in America, entitled "American Masala," praised Indians in North America for being "children of affluence" and "high achievers."

This celebratory trajectory and its underlying materialities are in stark contrast to the materialities of many Indians who reside in such metropolitan sites as New York or the Silicon Valley as domestic workers, illegal immigrants, and newly married brides dependent on their husbands' visas. Consider these two examples. The bride from India, married to a U.S. Indian male (who, in many cases, may feel more comfortable with a nonthreatening bride from India than an Indian woman born and raised in the United States), may hardly have any independent legal rights. Her relation to, and ability to be recognized by, the nation-state is mediated by the status of her husband. The husband's expatriate expertise value might render him privileged in relation to the legal, economic, and administrative structures of the nation, but he may be subjecting his wife to abuse and oppression at home. Immigrant women who enter the United States through marriage have H4 visas that do not allow them to work professionally or apply independently for resident status (a green card). To secure resident status, the husband would have to petition for the wife. This results in the husband being able to potentially perpetrate all kinds of abuse against the wife. Nandini Assar, director of the Washington-based South Asian women's Self Help Association, states that "what we see very clearly is that immigration status is one major tool for the abuser to use" (Raju, n.d., para. 5). United States federal law will often not intervene in such abuses. Frequently, arguments about different cultural norms are offered as a reason for non-intervention (Bhattacharjee, 1997). Cultural difference, or the logic of multiculturalism, is ironically used to reinforce neoliberal modes of governmentality, in which one's value to an increasingly privatized national sphere is determined by logics of profitability, and not by those of social rights and responsibilities. Further, in many cases, these young married women may not know enough English to be able to access legal services. Or they may feel intimidated to report the abuse, fearing ostracism from the local immigrant community, as well as the community back home in India.

Consider another story on human rights violation in the United States about an Indian woman named Maya. It was published in her own voice in an extensive report released in 2010 by the South Asian Network Organization of Los Angeles, entitled "From Displacement to Internment." From 1989 to 1990, Maya lived in the United States with her abusive husband, who was Indian. She had a child in that relationship, and she was on a temporary dependent visa while in the marriage. When her husband threatened to send her back to India without her child, she became afraid and escaped to India with the child. In India, she filed for divorce based on her husband's abuse. The divorce came through, freeing her—or so she thought—from the violence of her husband and granting her custody of the child. While raising her child in India, her husband contacted her in order to stay in touch with his child. Maya encouraged the contact, as she did not want the child to be deprived of his father. As her son grew up and received a scholarship to study in the United States, her ex-husband, learning of their trip to the United

States, filed abduction charges against Maya in a U.S. court. These charges came 18 years after she had returned to India. Child abduction charges have no statute of limitations. Again in the United States, Maya came face to face with a legal system that not only dismissed the divorce and custody orders authorized by courts in India, but also refused to hear her defense of domestic violence, for while in the marriage, Maya, out of fear, had not gone to the police. If convicted of child abduction charges (related to her *own* child with whom she had left the United States to escape patriarchal violence), Maya could face at least two years in a U.S. prison. Borrowing money to pay for legal fees, yet not having enough to go through a trial, she faced a probation officer who ordered several hundred hours of community service, but fortunately no jail time. But Maya soon learned that the judge sentenced her to prison because of her ex-husband's continuous pleas for her punishment and claims of child abduction. In prison for six months, Maya, lacking any legal support, suddenly became reduced to some form of "bare life." Already victimized for several years by an abusive man, Maya found herself re-victimized, this time by the judicial powers of the U.S. court system—a victimization that legitimized the domestic violence toward her and punished her for removing her son from a violent domestic life.

This is a complex situation in which the logic of multiculturalism, resting on the primacy of cultural identity, does not adequately function as an explanatory framework. The logics and dynamics of this situation far exceed the nation-state. Maya's exclusion or nonrecognition by the U.S. legal apparatus is not predicated on her cultural difference, as both she and her husband have the same cultural identity. While occupying the same cultural identity, she and her husband are differentially valued by the "host" nation-state in terms of rights, based on their different immigration statuses. Reducing this merely to a matter of gender difference—although gender clearly plays into this—also overlooks the transnational interruptions and divergences that inform this scenario. Maya's situation exceeds the dualistic, fixed, self/other, majority/minority model of multiculturalism and multicultural migrations. Such a model, as Asad (1990) has argued in his influential critique of multiculturalism in the British context, presupposes the existence of some recognized and institutionalized device for mediating differences that also allocates a minority or majority status to different groups. Maya's situation reminds us what it means to be a minority, an "other" cannot be understood only through fixed arrangements of relations within the nation. Placed in a transnational framework, these arrangements become unsettled.

Numerous factors intersect in Maya's scenario. The abused woman's divorce in India (even though she and her husband were married according to Indian laws) was not recognized by the U.S. courts, and it is because of this that she could be charged with child abduction. Here, issues of "family," and the communicative politics of "family," are complexly imbricated in geopolitics and the collisions of multiple modernities (and their legal and cultural apparatuses of power) under conditions of global migrations. Whether a divorce granted in another country will be recognized by the country where one (or both) partners are now residing is a difficult issue that cannot be forecast with predictability, as many nations are not partner to the International Child Abduction Covenant of the Hague. So, if one nation is a partner, but another is not, then the issue of recognizing the divorce in another nation is complicated. Additionally, nations such as the United States lack federal standards for such matters, which are under the jurisdiction of the states. Depending on the specifics of a case, a state may choose to not recognize a foreign divorce decree. The dynamics of the above scenario remain of particular interest to communication scholars. As there are no international laws that set standards for mutual recognition by nations on issues

of custody and what constitutes a "family" in the context of transnational migrations (signing the Hague Covenant is obligatory for nation-states), we are unable to name, and therefore communicate, the violence and injustices this situation can produce—as it did for Maya.

The current complexities of transnationalism thus produce situations of abuse and cultural injustice that cannot be understood solely through an argument about marginalization due to cultural identity.[10] Rather, these complexities can be seen as constituting an example of what Giroux calls the "biopolitics of disposability" (2008, p. 599). Giroux uses this concept to refer to the ways that, under neoliberal conditions, people and their identities (even within the same cultural group), are given differential value that is determined by the rationalities of the neoliberal global marketplace. New forms of privilege and recognition (by the nation-state and the engine of transnationalism that drives it) cut across conventional cultural/racial categories. Individuals belonging to the same cultural group may, today, fall on both sides of the state's value/disposability axis. There is no guarantee that, because an individual or individuals of a particular cultural/racial identity have achieved recognition by a particular "host" nation-state (such as the United States) this means the recognition necessarily reflects a progressive move toward multicultural justice. In Maya's case, she fell on the wrong side of the state's value/disposability axis, which had little to do with her cultural identity. Her husband, being a resident and recognized immigrant in the United States, was "listened" to by the state court, and based on that, Maya was thrown into prison. Her relation with her son was codified as "abduction." Although Giroux refers to "biopolitics of disposability" primarily in relation to market rationalities of neoliberalism, Maya's example illustrates how the absence of any legitimate national or international instrument for dealing with matters that require a transnationally sensitive intervention for evaluating "justice" can also engender a "biopolitics of disposability." Maya became caught, as it were, in an unnamed messiness of transnationalism that exceeded our communicative vocabularies of justice.

This raises some difficult questions. Is true transnational inclusion ever possible? Will there not always be some form of unrecognized transnational otherness that escapes our frameworks in any given moment? Is it possible to conceive of an outline of what a serious practice of transnational inclusion might be? Such questions are at the center of how we should conceive of, and engage in, cultural justice in a global context. My inclination here is to say two things: Yes, as an ultimate and absolute ideal, a full and comprehensive transnational inclusion of all forms of otherness would not be possible, for there would always be that slippage, that excess, that aporia that would escape our frameworks and practices of inclusion at any given time and period. There will always be an otherness that cannot be named. But—and here is the main thing—at a level of "practical politics of the open end" (to borrow Spivak's [1990] pithy phrase), it is important to nonetheless continually mark the transnational limits of current frameworks of cultural inclusion, to see both where they are able to take us, and where they are not. For it is only through such marking that we can continue to refine our frameworks in order to connect to the existence, as well as imagination, of Others whom we cannot bring into our available folds of difference.

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[10] Nancy Fraser, for instance, argues that the cultural identity model posits "group identity as the object of recognition," and this denies the "complexity of people's lives, the multiplicity of their identifications, and cross-pulls of their various affiliations" (2000, p. 112).

Multiculturalism as a Signifier of U.S. Exceptionalism and Modernity

A second logic that often underpins discourses of multiculturalism in self-proclaimed democratic societies in the West, and the United States in particular, is that its multiculturalism manifests its democratic exceptionalism. Indeed, a striking thing about the narrativization of multiculturalism in public discourses in the United States (as well as many other Anglo-American societies, such as Canada or the UK) is that the country's multicultural society is often used as evidence of its tolerance and openness in relation to many "other worlds"—today, especially Muslim worlds—whose cultures are dismissed as monolithic, rigid, backward, and closed. For example, Asad (1990) has argued (in the British context) that, today, diversity functions as *an effect* of modern government, or one can say governmentality. Similarly, Melamed has argued that contemporary multiculturalism in the United States "incorporates a supra nationalism into racial formation that privileges [the] multicultural American citizen as a subject more universal and legitimate than even the multicultural world citizen" (2006, p. 18). We saw this in the war on Iraq, where Islam was constructed as signifying a closed society in many political and journalistic rhetorics—too homogeneous, monolithic, and averse to diversity, all in contrast to the openness of the United States and the American vision of equality and human rights. In a 2006 speech, George W. Bush stated the following:

> Since the horror of 9/11, we've learned a great deal about the enemy. We have learned that they are evil and kill without mercy—but not without purpose . . ..And we have learned that their goal is to build a radical Islamic empire *where women are prisoners in their homes, men are beaten for missing prayer meetings*. [. . .] This struggle has been called a clash of civilizations. In truth, it is a struggle for civilization. *We are fighting to maintain the way of life enjoyed by free nations.* [. . .] At the start of this century America looks to the day when the people of Middle East leave the desert of despotism for the fertile grounds of liberty . . . (Bush Presidential Address, 2009, emphasis mine)

What is also to be remarked is that, after 9/11, political commentators frequently used right-of-center Muslims to denounce Islam's seeming incompatibility with democracy and secularism. One of the most notable celebrity commentators, named in 2005 by *TIME* magazine as one of the 100 most influential people of the year, is Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somalian Muslim who gave up Islam in 2002, lived in the Netherlands, and is now a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI). Her 2007 autobiography, *Infidel*, which was a *New York Times* best seller, discusses her youth in Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya and how she fled to Netherlands and applied for asylum.   Ali, who has been quoted in the *London Evening Standard*   (February 7, 2007) as labeling Islam as a "new fascism" (much like Nazism) and a "cult of death," has regularly opposed the teaching of Muslim religion to Muslim students, asking them, instead, to choose between the secular Dutch constitution or the principles of Islam (when she was in the Netherlands). The U.S. media has regularly given airspace to Ali, who has frequently asserted that we expect people in the West to be tolerant to Muslims, but Muslims are rarely respectful of Western secularism. Muslim dissidents and conservatives such as Ali become perfect alibis for nations like the United States to claim sensitivity toward Muslims. Ali's own assertion—as a Muslim—that there is too much tolerance of Islam in the West, that Muslims don't respect Western values, and that secularism is inherently incompatible with Islam feeds into an ethos where "we" believe that our multiculturalism

extends toward Muslims, but "they" have no respect for us. As Ali stated in an interview with *New York (magazine)* :

> In the culture of my parents, we never seemed to be able to succeed in such basic issues as getting food, interacting and living in peace with each other, or adapting to our environment, and the West, they've succeeded in all those. I'd been taught Western culture's only bad. Maybe that's good for your self-esteem, but it wasn't taking us anywhere. (Kachka, 2007, para. 5)

Although rhetorics of U.S. exceptionalism are not new, what is new about this new orientalism is the way in which it overtly incorporates a multicultural logic into its ethos to shore up its exceptionalism. When criticism was being hurled at the Bush administration for unlawful detention of Arabs and Muslims at the Guantanamo Bay prison, we were reminded of U.S. cultural sensitivity toward the prisoners. We were assured that prisoners were provided with copies of the Koran at government expense, that they were allowed time to engage in Islamic prayers five times a day, and that they had cells with arrows pointing toward Mecca. If they were in Guantanamo Bay, that had nothing to do with being Muslim, but only with the protection of the American people and continuing the "war on terror." In 2005, Max Boot, Senior Fellow of National Security Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations (a think tank historically entrenched in the Establishment) published a piece in the *Los Angeles Times* at the very time that allegations were being made by human rights groups that guards at "Gitmo" had abused the Koran (Boot, 2005). Many of the allegations were later withdrawn, possibly under pressure (for instance, *Newsweek* later withdrew its allegations that had called attention to this). When Boot's article refuted such allegations, it asserted with great pride that Gitmo guards received instructions from the Defense Department, which issued guidelines that called for the utmost respect for the sacred scriptures of their enemies: "Do not disrespect the Koran …." [and] "handle the Koran as if it were a fragile piece of delicate art" (Boot, 2005, para. 6)

This meant ensuring"that the Koran is not placed in offensive areas such as the floor, near the toilet or sink, near the feet, or dirty/wet area," and that "two hands will be used at all times when handling the Koran in a manner signaling respect and reverence." The article went on to express outrage and condemnation:

> [T]oo bad Muslims don't show the same exquisite concern for the sensibilities of others.
> . . . Too bad Islamic fanatics have no compunction about blowing up churches and synagogues and slaughtering Christians and Jews. . . . It would be nice if the global Islamic community, the news media, and assorted human rights agitators could display the same level of outrage about . . . our enemies as they do about the imaginary horrors of the American Gulag. [emphasis mine]

A significant claim of the article was that "Guantanamo Bay is the first gulag in history run on the principle that no [cultural] sensibility of the inmates should be offended."

Other examples of the administration's self-proclaimed multicultural sensitivity included the production of training videos by the Justice Department related to Muslims and Sikhs that were made available for use by local law enforcement agencies in their training practices.   These training videos provided information on how to respectfully and sensitively handle faith related matters of these communities. Also, the intervention in Iraq, first rhetorically framed as "Operation Infinite Justice," was later changed to "Operation Enduring Freedom" when the administration learned that the first label offends Muslims because, for them, Allah is the source of Infinite Justice. These are some instances of how multiculturalism has been officially employed as evidence of U.S. modernity and its seeming respect for cultural freedom and sensibilities of others, at the same time as the country was engaged in an illegal war (and illegal torture and detention, in violation of the Geneva Convention) and was covertly outsourcing torture to other countries, such as its ally Egypt.

Rowe (2004) has argued that one of the unique features of contemporary U.S. nationalism is that it imports global differences as aspects of the U.S. nation, and in the process, "hypernationalizes" (and therefore domesticates) transnational issues. This is in contrast to the functioning of traditional imperialism, where power moves from the national center outward. The examples above are instances of such hypernationalization of the transnational. The military's (and the administration's) seeming sensitivity toward Muslims and the Koran gets "hypernationalized," and the transnational interruptions posed by the history of Muslims that call into question many of the logics of U.S. modernity are bracketed out or reabsorbed into the framework of U.S. exceptionalism.[11]

Such a discursive strategy, where the other's transnational otherness is bracketed out and her/his presence in the nation is given an overarching (nationalist) meaning, has a long history and has been evident in the rhetorics of many recent U.S. administrations. When Bill Clinton, America's first "globalization" president, appointed Czech immigrant Madeleine Albright as his Secretary of State in the second term of his administration, he celebrated Albright through a nationalization of her immigrant/transnational status:

> It says something about our country and about our new Secretary of State-designate, that a young girl raised in the shadow of Nazi aggression in Czechoslovakia can rise to the highest diplomatic office in America. She watched her world fall apart. And ever since, she has dedicated her life to spreading to the rest of the world the freedom and tolerance her family found here in America. (Clinton, 1996)

Albright herself has frequently used her immigrant background—a background where America also apparently saved her—to influence foreign policy in Eastern Europe, including advocating for the

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[11] Both Gunew (2004) and Hage (1998) have made important observations that are germane to this, although in different contexts. Gunew, in the Canadian context, has talked about the colonial seeds in multiculturalism, and Hage, in particular, has discussed how, in Australia, multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism are absorbed into a discourse of the good whites whose seeming multicultural sensibilities function to bolster Australian nationalism. See also an insightful essay by Parameswaran (2009).

necessity of an American presence and ideals in Eastern Europe. The fact that Albright had grown up in communist Czechoslovakia, and the way that might have informed her subjectivity through transnational *contradictions* is all bracketed in Clinton's rhetoric about her, as well as her own self-construction, which she has often defined through the rhetoric of U.S. exceptionalism.

I realize that some of this may sound like another example of the immigrant success story that the United States is so famous for spinning, and as such, lead readers to wonder, "What does this have to do with c*ontemporary* multiculturalism? Haven't we always known this about the United States?" I want to suggest that, yes, on one hand, this is a well-known story of cooptation and assimilation. But it is much more than that. What is often inadequately addressed in our discussion of immigrants is the *transnational interruptions and linkages of their lives that are simply bracketed out in public discourse, thus disallowing their interruptive political possibilities to emerge.*[12] Both in public and academic discourse about immigrants, we tend to focus on the immigrant's struggles *here*, in the nation within which she or he is currently residing. Canadian communications scholar Karim Karim (2006) reminds us that, in Anglo-American contexts, the immigrant experience is primarily framed in response to the life worlds of immigrants *within* the nation, but the immigrant's continued and conflicting attachment to the nation of "origin," as well as numerous other nations that she or he may have lived in (increasingly the case today), is simply not addressed. The "other sides" of the immigrant's life that may interrupt the fields of recognition through which immigrants are given a "minority" status typically do not find much space in theorizations of immigrant cultures.[13] Spivak (2009), in the context of discussing Armenian-Americans, calls this a "unity as minority-American" logic, where the emphasis is on minority *American-ness*, on a shared sense of American-ness, but with very little about the other part(s) of the minority person's subjectivity that are intimately and disruptively connected to geographies outside the United States, and that cannot be brought into the prescribed folds of multicultural recognition within the nation.

A problem with such a nation-bound framing of the immigrant is that patterns of migration in the last five to seven years have been changing so rapidly that they defy many of the linear logics of modernity and migration that have usually underpinned Anglo-American conceptualizations of multiculturalism. This linear logic has been as follows: People from underdeveloped societies come to the United States (or another Anglo nation) and become part of the racialized minority landscape of the nation. They become part of the multicultural imaginary landscape as they gain residency and citizenship. But today, especially with the rise of Asia, statistics reveal that many new immigrants from Asia who are now in the West are either returning to their economically booming countries, or going to some other nation in Asia after having been in the United States for a short time (or even a long time). A Kauffman Foundation report (Wadhwa et al, 2011), in which scholars from Duke University, UC Berkeley, and Harvard University participated, illustrates that skilled immigrants from India and China have been

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[12] Asad (1990) has cogently critiqued the radical left's engagement with immigrant issues as merely a matter of race/racism, which he argues then makes it difficult to theorize and address forms of difference that exceed the recognizable differences related to race.

[13] For instance, works such as Anzaldua's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) have been influential. However, the focus of the work is on the immigrant's border struggles in relation to the United States. There isn't much about conflict or struggles that focus on the Mexico she left behind.

returning to their home countries in droves in the last decade. While hard data is not yet available on how many skilled immigrants have already left the U.S, Vivek Wadhwa, one of the authors of the report, stated in an online Indian newspaper, *Rediff,* (Jha, 2011) that around 150,000 immigrants have returned to India and China, **each**, over the past two decades. According to him, most authorities agree with this estimate. I am personally aware of many Indian families whose children were born in the United States and became adults here, that have returned to India or gone to places like Singapore or Dubai to set up home. If such a trend increases (and it clearly is increasing), then it provides us with one more reason to rethink many of our conceptualizations around multiculturalism in the United States, including the binary axis of majority/minority (in which whites are majority and immigrants are minorities), that inform such conceptualizations. The majority/minority racialized axis, while relevant within the context of the nation, becomes unsettled when we focus on migrations not only *into* Anglo-American nations, but on those emigrating out of the nation, as well.

Although the discussion in this section has primarily focused on the United States, it seems appropriate here to address the "death of multiculturalism" rhetoric that has recently surfaced in Europe. In Germany in 2010, Chancellor Angela Merkel loudly declared that multiculturalism had been an "utter failure." In the UK, Prime Minister David Cameron has also pronounced the failure of multiculturalism, pointing to how immigrants lead "parallel lives."[14] In France, President Sarkozy has made similar declarations, coming especially on the heels of the "burka" (headscarf) debate, as France attempted to legally ban the burka from public spaces. All these politicians, feeding off and reinforcing right-wing sentiments, express concerns about the failure of immigrants to integrate into the national culture.

Several issues are to be noted here. First, irrespective of what these politicians declare about the failure of multiculturalism, a diverse and multi-ethnic society in Europe is here to stay. It is Europe's postcolonial history that cannot be discarded, cannot be sent "back." Multiculturalism is Europe's reality and future. Second, what enables these politicians to declare the end of multiculturalism is their focus on integration. Their basic critique is that immigrants (and increasingly, the focus is on Muslims) do not care to integrate into the values of the national culture. The notion of integration, however, assumes that there *already* exists a neat and stable order *into* which one can and should integrate. At work here is an implicit argument that national culture is stable and has an essence that can absorb differences into its categories. While policy makers in Europe might be somewhat correct in saying that multiculturalism is not working, the solution is not to declare its failure. Rather, this provides an opportunity to think through cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity in a transnational framework. Minimally, this would require abandoning naive notions of nation and integration, and finding ways to negotiate "nation-ness" *through*, instead of against, transnational interruptions brought about by immigrant lives and hopes. Reworking

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[14] It is interesting to note here that, just a few months before Merkel made her 2010 statement, the FIFA World Cup (the world championships for men's national soccer teams) took place in South Africa. Germany won the match against England 4-1. At this time, the German national Sunday paper *Welt am Sonntag* proudly stated, "With courage and strength the German footballers were knocking on the gates to heaven. The happy ending for the midsummer fairy tale is getting closer." The team, however, represented the new, multicultural Germany. Five players were born outside of Germany, one held a dual German-Ghanaian nationality, and numerous others were second-generation Germans.

multiculturalism in the context of transnationalism requires new imaginations of transnational negotiations that can unsettle nation-bound framings of difference.

Multiculturalism Results in Cultural Inclusion of Minorities

A final, and indeed a primary, logic that informs our conceptions of multiculturalism is that multiculturalism provides a cultural framework for enhancing and securing cultural inclusion of marginalized groups. While this logic, in and of itself, is not a problem, the problem is that, when we look at the vast literature on diversity, multiculturalism, and racial justice in the U.S. (or even the UK) academy and national public culture, we find that there is rarely an attempt to geopoliticize and temporalize our assumptions about multiculturalism. We rarely *explicitly* mark that the multiculturalisms we speak of are situated in national contexts and temporalities of Anglo-American cultures (especially U.S. or UK cultures, the countries where the most visible work on multiculturalism and race has occurred in the Western academy).[15] This results in an unintended universalism of multiculturalism in our works where we assume—implicitly, at least—that the logic of multiculturalism is necessarily a progressive concept or mode for redressing relations of cultural inequality worldwide. It may be so in contexts such as the United States, the UK, or Canada—that is, in Anglo-American contexts—but what about its relevance in contexts outside the North Atlantic temporalities? How often do we even consider this? Scholarly engagements with multiculturalism and diversity in the Western academy, and the discipline of communication more specifically, have not said much about other global contexts. They have not considered whether the logic of multiculturalism even resonates as a progressive framework for redressing cultural inequalities in non-Western contexts.[16]

In many national contexts outside of the temporality of the North Atlantic West, multiculturalism has often been a part of the *everyday and official* fabric of life. It does not necessarily function as a central parameter for discussions of social inequalities. In many such contexts, multiculturalism may not even be

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[15] As my goal is not to critique any particular scholar, but rather, to mark a trend, I merely want to say that one could take up almost any article or text on issues of cultural difference and race in communication studies in the United States and find that the discussions occur in relation to the logics of Western liberal democracies and focus largely on North Atlantic contexts, especially the United States.

[16] Robert Stam's (1997) *Tropical Multiculturalism* should be mentioned here as an exception, for it focuses on multiculturalism in Brazil. Stam forcefully argues that we should not import American notions of multiculturalism into Brazil, but focus on the difference in Brazil. I agree with this aspect of Stam's work, but in his focus on Brazil, Stam chooses to frame cultural relations of Brazil through the lens of multiculturalism (while asserting that, of course, it is different there). The problem, as he himself notes, is that many Brazilians reject the concept as a *gringo* imposition. Thus, Stam's argument does not go far enough to consider whether, in very different contexts—away from North Atlantic temporalities—multiculturalism is a relevant or even politically progressive framework to engage in cultural analysis or describe relations of pluralism. As Shome (2009) has argued, in many contexts far away from the West, multiculturalism may not even be a pressing political issue, as cultural struggles of inequality might be occurring through other planes of power.

the most pressing political issue for engaging in issues of equality. Bhabha argues in an interview with Comaroff that

> Western liberals and neoliberals ponder the problems of multiculturalism while riding the crests of economic booms and technological advances . . . but in the practice of law and politics, they often find it difficult to imagine a form of ethical neighborliness amongst people of different cultures or race or religions. Colonial and postcolonial societies were given no such options, nor comparable privileges of economic development or academic reflection. *Colonized societies had "multiculturalism" imposed upon them from above and they evolved an ethic of survival that encompassed the presence of "otherness" as practice of everyday life and language*. . . . [I]t is grounded in a very real sense of "co-existence" that inhabits societies that are often too quickly described as lacking the liberal virtues of toleration and individualism. . . . [It is] a kind of negotiated accommodationism that is part of the neighborliness and hospitality of many postcolonial societies. (2002, p. 23; emphasis added)

Bhabha's point is that, in a postcolonial context such as India (and one can also think of places such as Singapore, Malyasia, or Hong Kong), at an everyday level of habitation and co-existence, multiculturalism and diversity are intricately woven into the fabric of neighborly belonging. You cannot escape it; you just grow up with it. You do not necessarily sit and ponder it or enter into dialogues about it at an everyday level. In any given moment in a day in India, you are engaged in neighborly interactions with Indians of many cultures and languages. Multi-ethnicity is imbedded in the official history of India; it is India's historical legacy predating the British empire by several hundred years, when waves of conquests resulted in numerous empires dominated by different ethnicities and religious groups. Given the multiple conquests that India has undergone for centuries, different communities and religious and cultural groups entered India, with the most notable being the Muslim conquests of medieval times that resulted in the huge Muslim population in India. The after-effects of this multi-ethnic history of invasions and conquests today makes diversity an everyday issue in intimate spheres of neighborly belonging in India. The constitution of India guarantees diversity. An official motto of India is "Unity in Diversity." Multiculturalism, therefore, as Bhabha notes, was already imposed "from above" (that is, the geopolitical relations of past invasions brought multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity into India centuries before it became a democracy). It is not a new concept that India somehow embraced after Independence. Nor is it, therefore, always an oppositional concept.

This officialization of diversity in India, however, does not obviate the discrimination that Muslim and Anglo-Indian minorities encounter. The Hindutva movement is alive and well. The Babri Masjid in Ayodhaya was shamefully destroyed in 1992. Muslims were butchered in the state of Gujarat in 2002 under the right-wing Chief Minister Narayan Modi. But this tyranny of Hindu fundamentalism exists side by side with an everyday imbedded multiculturalism that functions at a ground level of neighborly belonging. Thus, arguing for multiculturalism does not do much in the context of a nation such as India. The concept is so officialized, institutionalized, and solidified within national frames of recognition and celebration that it has become empty of political possibilities. To advocate for cultural and religious equality, other

vocabularies and frames of justice must be forged that exceed the liberal assumptions of multiculturalism and even the notion of diversity, for "diversity" is already saturated with officialization.

Similarly, in a context such as that of Singapore, Chua (1998) has argued that multiracialism functions as a tool for disempowerment. The notion of multiracialism is imbricated in the cultural policy of Singapore that endorses group equality (ibid.). Hence, any argument for racial rights by a particular racial/ethnic group becomes neutralized by the idea of group equality that is the foundation of this multiracialism itself. In Singapore, multiracialism thus pushes race out of the front line of politics, while still according it high visibility in the cultural sphere (ibid., p. 36).

Multiracialism in Singapore is an official policy. As policy, it often functions as an instrument of social control and the policing of boundaries of racial groups in the name of the larger public good and harmony (Chua, 1998; Goh, 2009; Goh & Holden, 2009). In keeping with the national officialization of multiracialism, the state decrees many religious holidays of Chinese, Indians, and Malays as national holidays. Every Singaporean is assigned a racial grouping at birth, based on the male parent. A student has to learn her or his mother tongue besides English in school, so as to develop greater bonding with her or his ascribed racial grouping. Unlike some other nations—in the West for instance, where, despite ethnic groupings, there is ultimately a shared sense of national identity that is encouraged (as in Asian-*American,* Mexican-*American*)—in Singapore, the government encourages strong group racial identification. There is often limited interaction among ethnic groups beyond the professional sphere. The nation was formed on denoting, marking, and prescribing distinct cultural identities (Chinese, Malaya, Indian, and others), instead of a larger Singaporean national identity. This tight racial grid not only suppresses expressions of hybrid cultural identities, but also erases many internal variations and histories within ethnic groups (for instance, those of South Asian origin all fall under the "Indian" category). Many consequently resent this multiracial governmentality and yearn for identification with a larger common Singaporean identity that can escape or transcend what Goh (2009) has described as a rigid racial grid of governmentality. Such a yearning was recently expressed by a noted political blogger in Singapore, Gerald Giam (2010). He argued in a blog that "our ethnic backgrounds are taking precedence over our Singaporean identity." He went on to suggest that, in Singapore, a melting pot approach (that is usually criticized by scholars in the West) that allows one to experience a broader Singaporean identity may be more productive in escaping rigid ethnic stratifications.

In Singapore's case, we find an interesting example of what Purushottam (1997) calls the "disciplining of difference" through a rigid identification with ethnic differences. We also see how, by encouraging strong racial group identification, the practice of state multiracialism prevents claims of cultural otherness or cultural discrimination. After all, if the state claims to recognize all ethnic groups within its cultural grids, then how does one argue cultural discrimination or a position of otherness? The binary of Self and Other, majority/minority, that has so informed discussions of Western multiculturalism, does not work here. If all ethnicities are recognized, then the majority/minority axis becomes ineffective. This is a clever and sophisticated political strategy for claiming an egalitarian society, where apparently no cultural group is a majority or minority. Whereas assimilation is denounced by critical race scholars in the West for being accommodationist, in Singapore, a prevention of assimilation into a larger national

common sense itself is a problem. In a context such as this, then, many of our West-centered assumptions of multiculturalism fail as productive concepts.

In a brilliant response to a lecture by Judith Butler (delivered at the *London School of Economics* in 2007), sociologist Chetan Bhatt argued that one can no longer be sure that the "set of ideas about subject, identity, and culture we work with" (in the West) has the ability to speak to the massive transformations in life worlds outside Europe and America, the rapid unscrambling and repackaging of what we call "identity," and the unraveling of the furnitures of consciousness that occur through new configurations of transnational state powers, militarism, and political economy (Bhatt, 2008, p. 28).

Bhatt's point is that the very communicative frames of knowability through which we construct our conceptual frameworks around cultural justice and cultural equality in the West are caught in a politics of time. Bhatt calls this the "now-time" (ibid., p. 26) of the West that prevents us from productively engaging with the cultural politics of "other times," and from forging other vocabularies of cultural justice and cultural inclusions that can speak to contexts that exceed our templates of race, ethnicity, multiculturalism, and cultural differences in the North Atlantic West.

Conclusion

This article has tried to take seriously the growing calls in communication studies for rethinking many of our North Atlantic-centered concepts and placing them in the tensions and struggles of transnationalism and non-Western modernities. It has also underscored the importance of recognizing how cultural relations in non-Western modernities may not lend themselves to the conceptual frames of justice, equality, cultural identity, and multiculturalism that we work with (and even unwittingly universalize) in Anglo-American contexts. As scholars committed to issues of cultural inequalities, power, and critique, our goal and responsibility must not only be to diversify the field of communication studies by focusing on different ethnic groups within our "known" public spheres. Our goal must also be to interrogate the extent to which our focus on diversity and cultural difference might remain saturated by the thick temporalities of Anglo-American histories that prevent us from engaging with other historical relations and struggles of cultural inequalities in other modernities. Further, globalizing communication studies should not simply be a matter of looking outward into non-Western contexts from *our* vantage points—where we absorb other cultural contexts or cultural relations into our already-existing epistemic fields. Rather, globalizing communication studies must minimally be an attempt to shift and *unsettle* the very epistemic vocabularies and underlying temporalities through which we engage in culture and cultural relations.

In focusing on the concept of multiculturalism, I have argued that concept is so saturated by the history and temporalities of Western national cultures that it betrays its limits when placed in the context of global relations and the logics of non-Western modernities. Such a betrayal, however, is not a failure. Rather, it offers a productive opportunity to forge other vocabularies for addressing cultural inequalities that are responsive to the realities of our transnational moment and committed to a global democratic project whose logics can exceed West-centric engagements with cultural difference.

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