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THE FUTURE OF MULTICULTURAL SOCIETIES

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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ABSTRACT

The article analyses two types of multiculturalism found in contemporary societies: (a) historically determined multiethnicity; (b) multiculturalism deriving from modern forms of cultural segmentation and organization in industrial societies. It considers the changes affecting both types of multiculturalism with reference to globalization, the waning of national cultures, free trade agreements, and interethnic and multinational hybridization. To counter the new forms of inequality and conflict arising from these changes, it argues in favour of a new definition of the role of the State and of international organizations as representatives of the public interest. It accordingly highlights the need to go beyond neo-liberal criticism of the State and neo-fundamentalist reactions that take the form of vaunting an ethnic or national identity.

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Nestor García Canclini

Let me begin with the following question: What do we mean by multiculturalism? As this is a changing concept in the social sciences and in debates on cultural policy, we must start by distinguishing between the various kinds of multiculturalism existing in Latin America at the close of this century. I shall concern myself here with two main types: first, historically determined multiethnicity, and second, multiculturalism deriving from modern forms of cultural segmentation and organization in industrial societies. Within the limits of this article, I shall briefly examine the fundamental implications of each of these phenomena and some of the ways in which they may be expected to develop in the future.

Multiethnicity has been discussed mainly by historians
and by anthropologists. There have also been significant studies of the subject by essayists and writers, especially in the Andean area (special mention should be made here of Mariátegui) and, in Central America, by authors such as Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes. However, very few sociologists or other social scientists apart from these have concerned themselves with multiethnicity and multiculturalism.

Until a few years ago, most studies on multiculturalism were the work of anthropologists alone and focused almost exclusively on the multiethnic character of the Latin American countries. Such studies have helped to reveal what lies behind the apparent homogeneity of our societies and to highlight the diversity of the groups, ways of thinking and life-styles that make them up. As the modern process of development in Latin America resulted in greater linguistic, educational, political and communicational integration than in Asia and Africa, it was assumed to be easier than in other continents to speak of Latin America as a coherent whole forming part of the present-day Western world. With the possible exception of the Arab countries, there is no other area where so large a number of independent States share the same language, history and main religion and, in addition, have for five centuries been in the same position *vis-à-vis* the Western colonial powers. For that reason, ethnic movements and anthropological studies have had an important role in making people aware that in Latin

America there are some 30 million Indians, with different territories, their own languages (the number of speakers of which are on the increase in some regions) and with their own distinctive work habits and modes of consumption. For five centuries, the resistance of groups such as Aymara, who number some 2½ million people, the Mapuche, numbering approximately 700,000, the Mixtec, numbering more than ½ million, the Maya, Nahuatl and Quiche, with each group numbering nearly 2 million, and the 10 million or so Quechua[1], has maintained their identity as major population groups in Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala and Mexico.

In the last 20 years it has been acknowledged even in the social sciences most heavily involved in the modernization process, like sociology and economics, that this cultural diversity is not necessarily an 'obstacle to development'. Pre-capitalist forms of production, social relationships based on patronage and kinship, along with religious beliefs and other immemorial values may be compatible with, or find a place in, today's crisis-ridden world. As the concept of modernity has become more problematic and as evidence has accumulated of how difficult it is to adapt European models of development to our countries, the unilinear conception of history in which capitalist growth and modern technology were regarded as hostile to non-Western traditions has come to seem less convincing. The result of this is that more attention is being paid to the occasionally beneficial role of cultural diversity in economic growth and grass-roots subsistence strategies. At the same time, it is being recognized that ethnic and religious solidarity may contribute to social cohesion and that traditional production techniques and modes of consumption may serve as a basis for alternative forms of development[2].

Nevertheless, there is no one-to-one correspondence between this newly flexible approach in scientific and political thinking and the demands of ethnic groups. Some countries have made considerable progress in recognizing ethnic pluralism, respecting the Indian groups' own forms of organization and developing procedures for participating in national life that allow of a range of modes of organization and political representation. The ethno-development policies applied in some Latin American countries and the legislation providing for Indian

self-government on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua are some of the signs of a partial shift away from a paternalistic approach to the Indian communities towards allowing them a greater measure of control over their affairs. But these attempts to develop other approaches are not proceeding without contradictions. In the meantime, Indian cultures continue to be seen in several countries as anachronistic relics or mere survivals, of interest only in terms of folklore or tourism. Furthermore, many Indian groups persist in their refusal to be integrated, even in pluralistic societies, because they consider that ethnic groups are 'potential nations': in other words, wholly autonomous political units[3].

In this context, it needs to be asked what possibilities the Indians have for maintaining a radical independence amid current trends towards the consolidation of modernization. The bulk of the political and indeed scientific literature on the ethnic issue focuses exclusively on the difficulties arising from inequality and domination. It is undoubtedly true that economic exploitation, socio-cultural exclusion and discrimination in education prevent the Indian peoples from developing autonomous societies in which their basic needs can be properly met. Even worse is the fact that neo-liberal economic policy, by making Indians and *mestizos* poorer in the last decade, has exacerbated the flight to the cities, clashes over land and political power, intercultural conflicts and racism. In some Latin American countries, such as Peru and Colombia, the worsening of economic conditions in town and country alike is one of the mainsprings of guerrilla movements, unholy alliances between peasant movements and drug dealing, and other outbursts of social violence[4].

It should be clearly understood here that I am making short work of highly complex issues in which many more factors need to be identified.

Nevertheless, the question of the future of multiethnicity cannot be raised only in terms of opposition between domination and subordination, or by reference to the twists and turns of a movement contending with modernization. Research conducted in the last few years[5] reveals that large Indian groups have become highly integrated into the capitalist process of production and the capitalist market, the industrial commodities network and the mass

education and communication system - in a word, into modern civilization. Although there are strong ethnic movements that are digging in their heels against Westernization, large sections of the Indian population are beginning to benefit from modern knowledge and technological and cultural resources. They are combining traditional healing techniques with allopathic methods, they are adapting to their own ends democratic changes in the economic and political spheres, and they are syncretizing their traditional beliefs not only with Catholicism but also with Protestant and evangelical movements that generally have a more radical approach to the promotion of modernity.

The use of modern resources does not necessarily cause them to discard their traditions. Many Indians have become eclectic through having realized that the unalloyed preservation of traditions is not always the most suitable way of reproducing themselves and improving their lot. I should like to refer here to some of the work in which I have participated, such as the study on craft production, for example, in the case of Michoacán or Guerrero, in Mexico[6], the Otavalo in Ecuador[7] and many others, from which it is apparent that local cultures grow and expand by becoming cosmopolitan.

To this end they are introducing contemporary scenes into a number of craft products, such as the Ocumicho clay devils and the Ameyaltepec amate (tree-bark) paintings, the Indians themselves are learning to travel by plane and to handle credit cards, and they are studying English and even Japanese. These are ways of stepping up trade and earning the money needed for them to improve their everyday lives. Among the aforementioned groups, the relative prosperity achieved through this modern reorganization of their craft traditions has enabled them to spend more money on revitalizing their ancient rituals. Something similar is happening with the Mixe and the Mixtec of Oaxaca, who are using computers to systematize their oral traditions. Recent anthropological research provides abundant evidence of unconventional, indirect strategies whereby subordinated groups seek to fit into modern society and to benefit from it. Harsh working conditions often reduce intercultural and interethnic encounters to straightforward clashes. There is no lack of situations in which differences and inequalities are heightened, to such an extent that the various classes and ethnic groups act as though

everything boiled down to confrontation. However, a more extensive and searching look at the day-to-day interactions of the majority groups shows Latin American countries to be hybrid societies where conflicting interpretations of modernity continually come to the fore. From the standpoint of methodology and cultural policy, therefore, I think that we must study not only intercultural conflicts but also the transactions between contending groups.

I should now like to tackle this subject from another angle and consider multiculturalism in an age of globalization.

The problems of multiculturalism do not end with multiethnicity, nor with the coexistence of a variety of regions within each nation. In this second half of the twentieth century, the modes of thought and ways of life fashioned in relation to local or national territories are only a part of cultural development. For the first time in history, most of the goods and messages received in each nation have not been produced within its own frontiers, are not the product of specific relations of production and hence do not bear any signs of an exclusive link with particular regions. They derive instead from a transnational, de-territorialized system of production and communication.

In a global village, we, the members of each society, do not form part of a homogeneous culture, nor do we have a single distinctive, coherent identity. Nor do we even experience situations characterized by mere 'cultural contact' between clearly demarcated social units, like those studied by anthropologists in the first half of the twentieth century in connection with colonization. Without travelling outside our society we experience interculturalism every day through the increasingly free and frequent worldwide flow of people, capital and messages. The objects and meanings that make up what we call our own culture, which is the product of a specific relationship with nature and with our neighbours and of the mythical and historical accounts that structure these experiences, exist side by side with goods and messages transmitted by the electronic media, migrants or tourists and through the many movements that constantly bring us into contact with other modes of action and feeling.

Ethnic groups and nations are multivariate settings wherein a variety of cultural systems intersect and interpenetrate. We are aware of socio-cultural heterogeneity and the challenge to traditional practices or mental habits without it being necessary for us to set foot outside our neighbourhoods or our houses. Within each group, and in each individual, various symbolic codes exist side by side. We are complex and motley aggregates of practices and signs, of intercultural exchanges and transactions. It is easy to prove this by the cosmopolitanism and the combination of tradition and modernity characteristic of artists and intellectuals, and also of the most highly educated consumers with simultaneous access to a variety of languages and cultural sources. But this multiculturalism is also to be observed among those Indians who from their pavement pitches, in Lima and Caracas, in La Paz and Bogotá, in the big Latin American cities, sell medicinal herbs alongside imported tape recorders, and handicrafts cheek by jowl with electronic gadgets. Similarly, I am thinking of the syncretic iconography of grass-roots movements, expressed for example in the figure of Superbarrio, in Mexico, a character who combines the image of masked wrestlers with that of Superman and has become a symbol of neighbourhood associations fighting for housing. Even among the working class, there are now large sections that are polyglot, multiethnic and migrant, their identity a patchwork of several cultures.

This hybridization does not necessarily mean equal opportunity for the different groups, especially where cultural innovations are concerned, but it does mean that we must think again about the rigid divisions between popular and élitist, traditional and modern or national and foreign. It is also necessary to take account of other factors affecting cultural interaction, considering not only ethnic or national variables but other variables that play a part in social stratification. In ongoing cultural studies of the United States in particular, there are signs of a new approach to multiculturalism that sees it as being the result of confrontations and combinations of very different identities, defined in terms of generation, gender, education, etc.[8].

How are these processes of free-flowing multicultural hybridization to be organized? How should one set about discovering the underlying trends and patterns so as to be able to

implement meaningful cultural policies, suited to this age of globalization? In industrial and, to some extent, post-industrial societies, such as partly exist in Latin America, it is possible to distinguish three main arenas for cultural development:

Firstly, culture which is historically and territorially determined, that is, the aggregate of knowledge, customs and experiences shaped over several periods in relation to ethnic, regional and national territories and revealed first and foremost in the historical heritage, the classical arts and traditional folk culture.

Secondly, mass media devoted to the major forms of entertainment (radio, cinema, television and video).

Thirdly, selective information and communication networks for decision-makers (satellite communications, fax, cellular telephones and computers).

To gain some idea of how multiculturalism will develop, we must consider what is likely to happen to it in each of these arenas. How will they be affected by the intensification of the processes of transnationalization and socio-economic integration, through free trade agreements, for instance, already well established in North America (Mexico, the United States and Canada) and in the Mercosur area (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay)? The first prediction we can make is that the impact of globalization and transnational integration on identity, cultural development and interculturality will not be the same in each of the three subsystems described.

In the first, which is that of the historical heritage and traditional folk culture, it is foreseeable that economic development will be small, since here returns on investments are lower and internal cultural inertia is more deep-rooted. However, some of those participating in the Mexican debate on the Free Trade Treaty point out the impact that may be produced on everyday culture by the demands of the former colonial powers for productivity and efficiency, if rigidly applied in Mexico.

Guillermo Bonfil noted that some changes that are being introduced into economic legislation and labour organization with the object of bringing Mexico into line with the demands of North American integration, take little account of long-established habits and the long-term cultural changes needed to bring about rapid increases in productivity and efficiency, in keeping with neo-liberal market norms. Agricultural labour, for instance, traditionally guided by a policy of crop diversification in order to achieve self-sufficiency, follows a production-oriented logic that is radically opposed to market concerns. According to Bonfil, '... There is nothing shocking in the change. The question is, who are those deciding it and for what reasons? How much weight does the actual opinion of country-dwellers carry concerning the changes that will be requested of them? How and by whom will it be decided whether to opt for the specialization of agricultural production in commercial crops or, on the contrary, for diversification geared to food self-sufficiency'[9]?

As regards the second subsystem, namely, the production of entertainment and news reporting for the general public, the trend in most of the Latin American countries is not so much towards globalization as towards greater dependence on United States firms. In some countries, 80 or 90 per cent of the programmes put out by each Latin American television company come from the United States. The exceptions are Mexico and Brazil, in so far as they have the technological, economic and human resources needed to achieve a degree of self-reliance in their national production and to extend their influence throughout the region. The increasing dissemination of news footage and television soap operas produced by Mexican and Brazilian companies clearly attest to their domination of the Latin American communication market. The problem here resides not so much in national production capacity as, especially in Mexico, in monopolistic concentration in a single private company (Televisa), which reduces the possibilities of diversified, critical representation of national and regional multiculturality. It is perhaps worth mentioning here that Televisa last year purchased television channels in Argentina, Chile, Peru and Venezuela and a Hispanic network in the United States to reach the Spanish-speaking population.

In the third subsystem - information, know-how and culture for decision-making and innovation - the asymmetry and subordination of the Latin American countries will become more marked with the lifting of tariffs on foreign production and the discontinuation of the few grants awarded for local technological development. Greater cultural and scientific dependence on state-of-the-art communication technology, which requires substantial financial investment and which at the same time leads most rapidly to innovation, will make us more vulnerable to transnational capital and to ideological currents from outside the region. It is perhaps here that asymmetry and inequality will have the most decisive - and negative - impact in the medium and long term. What place can Latin America have on the international market in the future, and how far can the societies that make it up become self-reliant, considering that the continent contains more than 8 per cent of the world population but accounts for only 6 per cent of the world's gross domestic product, 3.2 per cent of capital goods production, 2.5 per cent of engineers and scientists engaged in research and development and 1.8 per cent of world expenditure in this field[10]? The recession and the stagnation of the Latin American economies in the last ten years, together with the weakening of the State apparatus in education and culture, confront us with a paradox: efforts are being made to promote increased trade among the Latin American countries and between them and the countries of the centre at a time when we are producing fewer books, fewer films and fewer records. Integration is being promoted at a time when we have less and less to exchange and when lower wages are resulting in lower rates of consumption by the majority. With regard to all aspects of basic science, technological innovation and - especially where culture is concerned - data processing and information technology, all the Latin American countries share a tendency to become increasingly dependent on United States products. It seems to me that we are approaching a situation like that recently imagined by a group of humorists in Mexico, meeting to give their own opinion on the great debate that has been under way in Mexico in the last few months on textbooks for primary education. The humorists imagined what textbooks might contain in Mexico in the next century. One of the pieces ran as follows: 'Mexico is bounded to the north by the United States, to the south by the United States, to the east and west by the United States, and in the interior by the United States'.

I should now like to consider whether we are witnessing the death of the State. I wish to draw attention to two ongoing processes that are having an evident impact on the reorganization of multiculturalism: economic and socio-cultural transnationalization and, at the same time, the diminishing role of Nation-States as a result of privatization and the entrepreneurial reorganization of society.

When multiculturalism was a phenomenon confined essentially within each nation, and when conflicts were in the hands of Nation-States, these acted as arbitrators in the name of a public interest that transcended partisan struggles. The historical outcome of this State intervention assumed various forms. In Argentina and Uruguay, nation-building involved the regular replacement of the native population by migrants from many European countries; in others, such as Peru or Guatemala, the world of the whites was sharply separated from that of the Indians; in Mexico, efforts were made to integrate the Indians into national society through limited participation in economic, political and cultural life, which gave rise to intensive cross-breeding, under the domination of the Creoles.

In these processes, the State, while always endorsing some form of inequality, assumed responsibility for establishing an order that would transcend factional concerns and tried to reconcile them in the name of a national interest higher than that represented by mere leadership struggles or market competition. Who can represent this public interest and arbitrate in conflicts at the present stage, when the role of States is dwindling?

There are two diametrically opposed answers to this question: one is neo-liberal and the other fundamentalist. In some countries, like Peru, the army is the almost desperate bulwark of a middle class more concerned with speculation than with production and of a State that has lost historical control and its ethical and political justification for acting as an instrument to organize civil society. In other countries, such as Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia, where the State has relinquished its responsibility in the name of the free play of market forces, multiculturalism and other matters of public interest - education, health, work, violence - have

become stakes in a contest whose repercussions are costly and in which, of course, the poorest sectors pay the highest price.

At the opposite extreme, fundamentalist movements are re-emerging that believe it possible to make up for the sluggishness of the economy and of the Latin American States by exalting their own traditions (the most exaggerated but not the only cases of this are the Shining Path, and the right-wing rebel military group in Argentina known as the 'carapintadas' and their Venezuelan emulators). These 'solutions', which are more ideological than practical in nature, are surprisingly unrealistic in countries of very mixed composition, especially the biggest Latin American countries. There is little sense in wanting to reduce the myriad Argentine, Brazilian or Mexican life-styles to a fixed set of characteristics - to a monotonous, mummified heritage. Strictly speaking, this magical expedient to avert the uncertainties of multiculturalism is everywhere ceasing to be viable. Societies are becoming increasingly cosmopolitan and the economic deadlock of States, which prevents them from having any surpluses to distribute, rules out any populist idea of reinstating them to manage the national wealth.

How, then, can democratic multiculturalism be developed? What can be done to guarantee equal access throughout society to the many different international goods available in the global village? It is necessary to steer a course between the Scylla of cosmopolitanism for élites, as advocated by the neo-liberals, and the Charybdis of fundamentalism that seeks the illusory haven of self-sufficient national or ethnic traditions. In order to work out new routes to democratic multiculturalism it is essential to recreate opportunities for social harmony and negotiation on the basis of public interest. There is an urgent need to redefine the role of States and multinational and multicultural agreements in order to reclaim that which belongs to the people, understood as the multicultural community. I would note here a task that cannot be examined within the limits of this paper but which I consider to be of key importance. It is necessary both to deconstruct the idea of the State as coinciding with a fundamentalist and insular concept of the nation and to stop it from being engulfed in a fierce battle of private interests. The development of contemporary societies cannot be other than multicultural.

Democratic multiculturalism, in its turn, can be achieved only through a redefinition of the international public interest. How we set about recreating this sense of community will determine whether our American multiculturalism will be our fate or our fortune.

NOTES

1. The source of these data is the Latin American indigenous population report prepared by Cadal and published in Guillermo Bonfil Batalla's book, *Utopia y revolución. El pensamiento político de los indios en América Latina*, Mexico, Nueva Imagen, 1981, pp. 419-426. As the author points out, the figures are approximate owing to the somewhat lax handling of information concerning Indians in censuses.
2. Among recent studies that reconsider the role of culture in development, special mention should be made of the work of Lourdes Arizpe, 'Pluralismo cultural y desarrollo social en América Latina: elementos para una discusión', and Rodolfo Stavenhagen, 'Notas sobre la cuestión étnica', published in *Estudios Sociológicos*, Vol. II, No. 4, January-April 1984, pp. 17-28 and 135-167; and the studies by Jorge Graciarena, 'Creación intelectual, estilos alternativos de desarrollo y futuro de la civilización industrial', and Celso Furtado, 'Creatividad cultural y desarrollo dependiente', published in the book by Pablo Gonzales Casanova (ed.), *Cultura y creación intelectual en América Latina*, Mexico, Siglo XXI-UNAM-United Nations University, 1984, pp. 1-24 and 122-128.
3. See how this position is justified in the context of the debate on Indian identity and ethno-development in the article by Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, 'Los pueblos indios, sus culturas y las políticas culturales', in the book by Néstor García Canclini (ed.), *Políticas culturales en América Latina*, Mexico, Grijalbo, 1987. The reader may also consult the book by Rodolfo Stavenhagen and Margarita Nolasco, *Política cultural para un país multiétnico*, Mexico, United Nations University, 1988 (particularly the articles by R. Stavenhagen and Lourdes Arizpe).
4. Cf. Carlos Ivan de Gregori, *The Maturing of a Cosmocrat and the Building of a Discourse Community. The Case of Sendero Luminoso*, paper given at the workshop of the UNRISD Working Group on Political Violence, Geneva, April 1992.

5. Reference should be made to two texts of basic importance here among recent writings on the subject: José Jorge de Carvalho, *O lugar da cultura tradicional na sociedade moderna*, University of Brasilia Foundation, Anthropology Series, No. 77, 1989; Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas: estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*, Mexico Grijalbo - CNCA, 1990, Chapters V and VI.
6. Concerning the modernization of the Michoacán craft industry, cf. Néstor García Canclini, *Transforming modernity: popular culture in Mexico*, University of Texas Press, 1992. Concerning amate paintings, see Catherine Good Eshelman's book, *Haciendo la lucha. Arte y comercio nahuas en Guerrero, Mexico*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988.
7. Lyn Walter, 'Otavaleño Development, Ethnicity and National Integration', *América Indígena*, Year XLI, No. 2, April-June 1981, pp. 319-338.
8. For a survey of ongoing studies on multiculturalism in the United States of America, see Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treicher (eds.), *Cultural studies*, New York-London, Routledge, 1992 (particularly the introduction and the articles by Homi Bhabha, Tony Bennett, James Clifford and Paul Gilroy).
9. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, 'Dimensiones culturales del Tratado de Libre Comercio', *Mexico indígena*, No. 24, September 1991, pp. 7-18.
10. Data from ECLAC-UNESCO (OREALC), *Educación y conocimiento: eje de la transformación productiva con equidad*, Santiago, Chile, 1991, p. 54. Quoted by Jose Joaquin Brunner, 'America Latina en la encrucijada de la modernidad', in Jesús Martín Barbero (ed.), *En torno de la identidad latinoamericana*, Mexico, Opción, 1992.