



Cultures, Nations, Differences

THE PARADOXICAL FANTASIES OF LIBERALISM AS DEMOCRACY

Sou um mulato nato
No sentido lato
Mulato democrático do litoral.

Caetano Veloso, "Sugar Cane Fields Forever"

AT THE CLOSE of the twentieth century, the demise of socialism and the victory of capitalism as a one-world system drove the world into a deep conservative recoil.¹ The long march toward a utopian world came to a full stop, and the drift to globalization held sway apparently uncontested. Severely shaken by its untenable identification with socialist politics, Marxism lapsed from the ideology of liberation to just another classical German philosophy, and the struggle for social justice came to be relocated at the heart of liberalism.² Socially concerned liberal scholars turned their gaze inward to seriously reconsider the tenets of such political ideology, and the struggle continued within the liberal front. The grating sounds this shift produced are still audible.

In its wake, legal, political, cultural, and philosophical debates on the nature of multinational, multicultural states and on difference have ensued. These debates are twofold: they represent, on one hand, the tail end of a search for liberation that mirrored the anticolonialist and anti-imperialist thrust pervading the political space throughout the entire last century, and, on the other, the intellectual offensive against the strategies that the “new religious right” is mounting against the great majority of the global population under the guise of democracy. The most recent developments in the Middle East—Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine—and in several localities of the African and American continents are patent examples of this struggle. Grappling with these situations is part and parcel of my quest to determine the nature and possibilities of cross-cultural dialogues in a multiethnic and multicultural global environment where liberalism may seem to be at its limits. At the root of this quest is an attempt to come to terms with the contradictions of liberalism. For, if the axiom is true that liberalism was born as a contested political ideology—sometimes more conservative and prone to the preservation of property as good governance, sometimes more radical, advocating an end to different rules for the poor and the rich—then the aporias inherent in liberalism suggest up front that it is not likely to be successful in its stated goals.

The overall strategy of this plunge into the philosophies of liberalism is to investigate the truth content and universal character of natural and human rights, and thereby test the limits of a doctrine that is organized around a set of seemingly paradoxical relationships. In this vein, I explore the possibilities of bringing the incongruous fantasies of liberalism—such as democracy, justice, and the common good—to bear in the organization of the neoliberal, democratic, postmodern, and now global state.³ The unstated, yet related, concerns of this internal probe are, first, an anxious search for the locus of social hope and, more pressingly, the question of the possibilities of world politics.⁴ The high stakes of this probe involve reviving the radical possibilities of liberalism, before global differences come to be the only explanation for criminality, terror, and terrorism. These acts, together with their misinterpretations, threaten to curtail, or at least heavily encumber, struggles for civil and human rights worldwide.

Myriad well-researched scholarly works on identities, cultures, and nations already document the violence inflicted by colonialism upon people that are considered different. In the Latin American field, most of our “native” categories of analysis—acculturation, transculturation, heterogeneity, and hybridity—speak to that issue directly. However, to converse about human rights using this contemporary vocabulary of liberal struggles simply acknowledges the standard idioms of the current ideological debate and tackles the questions within the same terrain. Thus, speaking liberalism in this way signals that there are no contested ideologies, no counterhegemonic projects, and that we are on the threshold of a new postmodern modality of colonialism that is devastating and ferocious. It is a modality, following Masao Miyoshi, that begins with a total indifference for regions of the world outside the megastates of Europe and the United States, known as “Fortress Europe” and “Fortress United States.”⁵

This indifference amounts to nothing less than an all-out offensive against people outside these two fortresses—although some, considering the multilateral effects of policies such as outsourcing, will argue that the offensive is also internal. The irony is that this offense is carried out under the banner of liberalism and a larger strategy that calls for the establishment of “democratic” regimes. Here, “democracy” only gives the impression of a cover for the ability to control natural resources throughout the world. The condition of this possibility is the eradication of all forms of multiculturalism worldwide. In this context, democracy and its corollary, modernization, simply come to suggest a total disregard for the multicultural nature of the world: that is, to put it bluntly, a disregard for the nature and character of individual, historical, and particular cultural formations, which is tantamount to selling them off at a discount price. If carried to its conclusion, this campaign quite simply promises to deliver instability into all forms of modern institutions, and, worse yet, to induce political chaos throughout the world, all in the name of liberalism.

It is my purpose, then, to demonstrate the aporetic and politically untenable position of a particular philosophy of freedom whose only condition of possibility is the eradication of difference through the politics of indiscriminate force. My point is to demonstrate that liberalism is specifically grounded in a

particular form of historical development, and that this specificity does not seem transferable or translatable—no matter how attractive and desirable the liberal philosophy may be. Consequently, cultures with different historical developments do not easily reproduce it. What they do, instead, is to interpret it, or more precisely, to adapt the core principles of liberalisms to their own specific circumstances and act on them accordingly. The result is, at best, a skewed and bizarre performance, an illiberal form of liberalism that all but enhances the paradoxes of the creed. Proof of this is provided by the examples of Latin American scholarship I rehearse in this book.

LIBERALISM AS A POLITICAL IDEOLOGY AND AS COMMON SENSE

The difference between liberalism as politics, as philosophy, and as common sense is a pertinent point of departure for my discussion. The theoretical distinction between philosophy and common sense that I use has been thoroughly rehearsed by Antonio Gramsci, and I would refer the reader to his body of work.⁶ The problem I embark upon is the fact that although liberalism provides the basic political atmosphere for our lives in the West (that is, for us, liberal philosophy has lapsed into common sense), most of us are far from understanding the intricate detours of liberal, democratic governance that is liberalism as politics. Furthermore, few of us can grasp the conundrum that colonialism, imperialism, native indigenous populations, migration, heterogeneity, and the more recent phenomenon of outsourcing bring to the heart of liberalism.⁷ To glance at these vast and complex webs of meaning—to which the entire body of post-colonial, gender, and ethnic studies have dedicated their efforts—we ought to understand first some of the internal tensions within liberalism itself, and, second, the queries that multiculturalism, multiethnicity, and difference have raised toward it. My purpose is to bring the totally unfamiliar displacements, shifts, and adjustments world scholars perform into the theater of discussion in order to fit the intricacies of the particular socialities they examine—like those of Latin America—into the liberal philosophical and political code. These

adjustments, displacements, and shifts constitute, if not our political unconscious or our deepest desires to belong, then simply an all-out case of bad faith.⁸

LIBERALISM is a totalizing philosophy. It is a distinct framework organized around a set of core concepts that constitute the ground for calculating, reading, and interpreting political, social, cultural, and economic life. Following Stuart Hall, philosophically, we can say that liberalism stands for “individualism in politics, civil and political rights, parliamentary government, moderate reform, limited state intervention and private enterprise economy.”⁹ Politically, it “entails sovereign individuals casting their votes, political parties representing the people and competing for the right to shape the will of the state, and elected representatives deliberating on their behalf in legislative bodies in between elections. The state is neutral with regard to the competing conceptions of the good, government and elected officials are generally attentive to public opinion, relevant players abide by the rule of law, and external actors do not intervene in domestic politics.”¹⁰ Liberal democracy is “representative government, the rule of law, a regime of entrenched rights, the guarantees of certain freedoms.”¹¹

Although the imaginary horizon of liberal politics in practice is much less tidy, in common practice it has also come to stand for a form of practical reasoning and thought. This is an attitude that stands for being open-minded, rational, and freedom-loving, “a taken-for-granted discourse of everyday life that shapes the ‘practical consciousness’ of the masses.”¹² In this sense, the stock from which liberal thinking draws its major tenets recedes from memory, and the historical struggles that inform its function appear as merely natural. This gives liberalism its resonance with an immemorial past, while simultaneously projecting it forward into a concept of eternal time. It is this all-encompassing logic that enables liberalism’s transition from a philosophical ideology to common sense, and this shift is precisely what grants liberalism its sense of universality. Beyond this universal claim, all of its core concepts only make real sense when they are understood against the background of European history and the emerging social order of the bourgeoisie. Liberalism, which in those days was a socially progressive and democratic ideology, is therefore intimately related to the rise of the modern capitalist world, where it informs modernism by op-

posing feudalism. For instance, the idea of popular power first appears in contrast to the absolute power of the monarch, freethinking is a response to ideas of order that ascribe it to some source, and the notion of individual freedom emerges against the tight grip of religion.

As a broader discourse, liberalism is a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy born in England out of English struggles for the freedom of trade and correspondent forms of governance. It is reasonable, then, to surmise that as a political philosophy, liberalism serves English—and later western European and U.S.—history well. However, when it migrates to other contexts, such as the Latin American countries (not to mention Africa and Asia, and even Eastern Europe) liberalism, like all traveling theories, requires heavy adjustments and goes through a severe and at times bizarre process of analogues. For example, in Latin American scholarship, the interests of the *criollos*, as the emerging social group seeking their independence from Spain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, are implicitly considered analogous to the interests of the Whigs in England—an absurd idea. And while this fallacy is nourished by the historical fact that the *criollos* used liberal ideas for their struggles, and in many instances were both ideologically and financially supported by English groups, the radical differences between the two social formations ought to be enough to bring us to a full stop. In actuality, the historical development of Latin American societies more closely follows Caribbean scholars' descriptions of the process of creolization, and multicultural theorists' examinations of multi-ethnic and multinational societies, in marked contrast to the liberalism that emerges from the western European tradition.

As a political philosophy, liberalism claims to be an open system. However, it is a very well worked out totality in which all kinds of procedures work to fasten tight the social contract. Liberals call this a civil (or civilized) way of being that ensures the common good, a system that depends upon a firm, tight matrix of attractive core concepts—civil society, public sphere, the state, and markets. But what these concepts, in fact, do is define the conditions of possibility of the structure. They map out what can be said and what is off limits. Individualism is the solid and unswerving bedrock upon which liberalism firmly rests and to which all the other concepts of liberalism refer; all liberal concepts flow from

individualism, and nothing can be understood outside of it. In actuality, human and natural rights are coterminous with the rights of the individual. Together they constitute a synergy that holds together the edifice of liberalism and that underwrites its particular claim to universality. Hence, if this core concept is flawed or insufficient, as historians of colonialism have strongly demonstrated, the whole theoretical edifice is tremulous, ready to collapse under the weight of its own tacit assumptions and presuppositions.¹³

Given that the relationship between liberalism and the bourgeois western European worldview has been in the intellectual market for some time, one wonders about the urgency with which multicultural liberal theorists repeatedly return to it nowadays. Their body of work on liberalism posits several concerns that I will here group into two: the recognition of the unresolved tensions at the heart of the doctrine—tensions that are aggravated when the political philosophy is exported to different social sites; and the need to preserve the universal validity of the system and to honor the open character of its philosophy. With these interests in mind, liberal scholars of multiculturalism working to analyze the nature of multiethnic states have offered a series of amendments to make room for the inclusion of all sorts of people defined as “different.” Whether or not these people classify as individuals has been the burden of postcolonial, subaltern, gender, and ethnic studies.

These shifts toward a more inclusive form of liberalism as a philosophy of rights informing governance signals a tacit recognition of the homogeneity upon which the internal coherence of the system rests (a theme we will return to later). Furthermore, it is a struggle that liberalism permits. Michael Walzer has argued this issue in his discussion of two forms of liberalism, what he calls “Liberalism 1” and “Liberalism 2.” Liberalism 1 “is committed . . . to individual rights and . . . to a rigorous neutral state, that is, a state without cultural or religious projects or, indeed, any sort of collective goal beyond the personal freedom and the physical security, welfare, and safety of its citizens.” Liberalism 2 “allows for a state committed to the survival and flourishing of a particular nation, culture, or religion, or of a (limited) set of nations, cultures, and religions—so long as the basic rights of citizens who have different commitments” or who do not have any such commitments at all “are protected.”¹⁴

We need not review the entirety of world history to realize that the synergy of a natural individual and his or her human rights is a concept deeply and absolutely contradicted by the narratives of other social formations, such as those based on slavery, debt peonage, indenture, and many other forms of labor. These social formations are responsible for transforming human individuals into chattels and have determined the form and shape of political governance in many parts of the world. Furthermore, these systems not only cohabit with liberalism; they have actually been sponsored by it. Thus, world history brings us to one of the most severe and unresolved questions at the heart of liberalism: namely, the question of human rights.

In order to understand the aporias of the system, we must review all those abundant narratives that offer samples of liberalism at its limits. In this case, it is important to revisit and reappraise the documents that speak about population segments that lack all kinds of human rights, live under perennial states of exceptionalism, and circulate in texts only under generic names.¹⁵ Such is the case of *indios*, *cholos*, *serranos*, *sambos*, *selváticos*, *jinchos*, *cabecitas negras*, and *huachos* in Latin America; blacks, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and now Latinos/as in the United States; Jews, *pienoirs*, *moros*, and Turks in Europe. Generally, liberal thinkers tend to claim that these proliferating descriptions of difference occur only in illiberal societies. However, such categories are easily accommodated by a liberal, democratic, and universal philosophy; furthermore, liberal human rights are precisely the flip side of these lacks of rights, as liberal ideas not only foment these distinctions and differences but even benefit from them. In this case, the burden for liberalism is then to explain and account for the legal and philosophical status of these population segments and make a statement as to whether or not it is important, necessary, and plausible to dialogue with them. Judging by the number of studies, the answer is in the affirmative. Therefore, what is at stake is the validity of the system itself: its universal, and now global, feasibility. Today, more than ever, it is imperative to prove that human rights are not the prerogative of one ethnic group alone, nor of one nation; they must be the right and prerogative of all human beings, regardless of race, gender, religion, or national origin, lest liberalism become just another particularism disguised as the universal. In this way, the interro-

gation of liberalism by ethnic, gender, and multicultural studies and scholars constitutes a truly democratic gesture. In today's world, this is the only possibility of politics and governance.

It is well known that liberal governing practices across the globe (from Latin America to Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and even western Europe and the United States) are contrary to the philosophical principle that understands the individual to be a social agent unencumbered by the limitation of status, position, and so on, free from constraint, and endowed by his or her natural birth with inalienable human rights. Histories of maltreatment and abuse carried to the extreme of massive killings or pogroms in some of these societies force us to reflect on the nature of human rights.¹⁶ In their political practices, these governments drastically trample upon the principles that sustain the notion of the individual in liberalism. For them, human rights are not grounded on nature and do not bear on all forms of social intercourse; they do not “belong to individuals as individuals in the state of nature and [are] therefore [not] prior to entry into society.”¹⁷ In these particular historical instances, liberalism loses all its universal philosophical seduction. It stands as a theoretical abstract and, at best, an idealist philosophy, one that is the source of much confusion when it attempts to explain forms of governance whose conditions of possibility are precisely contrary to what liberalism predicates in matters of universal human rights. In the nations under study in this text, in no way or manner could liberal principles be viewed as respectful of human rights, or as the expression of the common good upon which the foundation of political society—or the state—rests. This fundamental disparity accounts for my proposal that Latin American nations historically have developed in manners more akin to the models of multicultural, multiethnic, or so-called Creole societies/states, than those of liberalism, even when qualified as plural.

To offer an example of how this disparity spans the entire gamut of liberal literatures and illustrates my point, the distinction between natural and native suffices. Both natural and native are idioms that have circulated within the field of liberal philosophies for sometime. The critical difference between them is that whereas *natural* refers to the citizen-subject, *native* names the colonial subject. Thus, although the concept of native carries connotations of primitivism

that the concept of natural lacks, primitivism, in the sense Freud granted this term (a presocial form of being) subtends both concepts. *Natural* and *native* are terms that could be conflated and work as synonyms, however much they seem to establish a radical opposition and deepen the distinctions between humans and their rights.¹⁸

From the beginning of modernization, the difference between European states and Amerindian societies produces a covenant that divides natural from native rights. People without well-established states are people without history.¹⁹ In Hegelian terms, history is contingent upon the formation of the state and is hence the history of the state. Considered within a Hegelian epistemology, *native* refers to the rawest state of being, a quasianimal, primitive ontology, previous to civil society (civilization) and the social organization of labor to fit human needs. *Natural*, in contrast, already implies a transition into civil society, a step previous to political society, where labor in the abstract will deliver the organization of the state.²⁰ Natural society is the society of needs. Civil society is the society of organized labor. Political society is a society in which labor in the abstract is the organizing principle of the social. In civil society we already find in operation the foundational principle of liberal individualism, a condition that precedes the foundation of the state and the full realization of human nature. In the course of human interaction, the logical development from natural, to civil, to political societies suffers an *interruptio* that preempts the possibilities of state formations and produces the societies of natives. Scholars of colonialism attribute this *interruptio* to colonialism itself. Colonialism marks the divide that sunders humanity and explains the caesura between native and natural, who throughout history stand poised on the opposite sides of a partition later to become the distinction between civilized and uncivilized or primitive. Hence, the merging of native and natural is only the labor of political desire and of political opportunism visible in sentimental and romantic fiction. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the categories native and natural are willfully merged in these genres so that Latin American states become plausible.²¹ Borrowing from postcolonial scholars, these narratives can be read as marketing techniques, making the “native” a good item for purchase when native stands for natural. Doris Sommer argues this eloquently in

“Sab c’est moi,” where she maintains that *criollo* writer Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda speaks of herself when speaking for and about her slave, Sab. Through the work of such narrative, *native* (later to become mestizo, hybrid, Creole, migrant, *cholo*, or what have you) enjoys ample circulation and becomes a common dividing idiom, an empty signifier that continues to refer to those without names in the metropolitan public sphere to this date.

European and Latin American romantic and sentimental literatures go on to circulate the homology between the pure and innocent native as a natural man—perhaps, in the best of cases, as a catachresis of his “natural” European counterpart. The dramatic creation of the Latin American states thus occurs through the idealization of natives—Ladinos, acculturated Indians, mixed breeds, mestizos, mulattoes—frail and flawed fictional characters usually associated with the romantic literatures of the period of independence. Sab, Oronooko, Hamel, María, Enriquillo, Yariko, the “good woman” of Anotto Bay, Mary Prince—these are just a sample of those agents whose social pacts with the *criollos* would enable the latter to fashion a temporary common-front politics and thereby establish their own liberal states in which their natural human rights would prevail—“Sab c’est moi.” Romantic literature and its native characters here constitute the medium for the illusory establishment of the analogies, as absurd as they may be, between Latin American *criollos* and English Whigs or the people of the French Commune.²² Scholars of postcolonialism discuss these ideas regarding the native in sentimental and romantic fiction at some length.²³ But aside from this instrumental use of nativism as grounds for individualism, individualism is primary, in essence, because the idea itself is grounded in nature, on the notion of instincts and drives, on the primitive of totems and taboos, as Freud has amply demonstrated, and easily underwrites the sign of native as a natural man. This also occurs in the case of its flip side, the idea of a natural man as native. Native, however, is never granted the status enjoyed by natural. In fact, native could be interpreted as a category halfway between animal and human. It names an arrested development, a frozen state of being, that which was bred by the policies and politics of liberal colonialism, a stateless being.

The significance of natural (as primitive and primary) in individualism is that it facilitates and firmly grounds the notion of the state.²⁴ And here is where the idea of reason enters the scene: first, as the protocols of discussion (Hegel calls it transcendence), the logic that brings all concepts together to constitute a system; and, later, as that part of being that conflicts with instincts (the primitive) and establishes a perennial tension that the state will come to mediate. Freud formulated it as the distinction between Eros and Thanatos, civilization and its discontents. In this way, reason is doubly articulated: first as rules and protocols, and then as that which is unnatural, a transcendence of nature. Moreover, reason is also that which names the distinction between competition and collaboration or regulates competition for the sake of collaboration.

Here we see that in classical liberalism, nature and the state are poised as the opposite poles of natural being. Furthermore, the distinction between reason and instincts also subtends the divide between citizens and natives, states and societies, nations and empires. One argument that runs throughout the system is that the egotistic (or individual) pursuit of happiness or the good life, which is mediated by labor in its abstract form, provides the basis for the social contract, whose ontological foundations are all predicated on nature. It is only through free consent that individuals sufficiently abrogate their natural rights to create society and government. Consent is thereby the sole condition for legitimacy. This certainly seems like an attractive proposal. In contrast, colonialism is just the opposite of government by consent, and consequently the flip side of reason, state, and human rights.

As the domain of public duties and responsibilities, the state, in exchange, provides the conditions so that individuals are free to pursue their own affairs both in private and in public. Yet, the ascription of primitivism to individualism explains why the theories of Freud and Lacan are necessary addenda and supplements to liberalism and its critics. This additionally explains why Freud begins his examination of death, in *Totem and Taboo*, by studying prestate forms of societal organization: that is, the relationship between the native and the natural. For, if liberty means freedom from constraint for the individual

to realize “his natural, egoistic drives and instincts,” then theories of the unconscious (like those of colonialism and postcolonialism) serve to explain the lingering presence of unreason even in societies based on consent.²⁵ Law and the unconscious, as Lacan clearly saw the link between them, are the basis for understanding the constitution of primitive individualism and modern citizens’ identities, as well as their counterpart, as forms of oppression of individuals that are kept hovering at the margins of liberal human rights.

Understanding how the system works philosophically is of the essence in understanding how it works politically. It is useful, in turn, for the present work in showing that liberalism is, in fact, at its limits, as evidenced by a curtailment of human rights today that is every bit as severe as the lack of human rights that has prevailed under the systems of colonialism, both neo- and post-. Further evidence appears in the curve of liberalism that has moved from classical and communitarian to social-democratic forms, and from there back to a neoclassical stance, the form and content of what we call neoliberalism. May I suggest that this return is a sign of weakness, a form of empowering its disempowerment, a strategic necessity, but one that nevertheless comes to haunt the liberal state from within, as theorists of multiculturalism attest?

Here, vast arrays of old and new varieties of criminality defy the liberal state, as if all forms of the primitive, the instinctual, and the natural, as well as the native, have been let loose in the midst of the most organized forms of labor and states. A neonatural and neonative society from below threatens to dissolve the divide between natural, civil, and political, whereas from above, political society moves in parallel, complementary, and opposite directions. Both do so in full force. The medium for this discussion passes through the hurdles of the basic concepts of civil society, public sphere, state, and labor, as we will have the opportunity to examine in the chapters that follow. But first it is necessary to examine how the invisible hand of the human as native and as natural haunts the borders of a disorderly state.

If the philosophy of liberalism as a refined totalizing system is flawed in the arena of human rights and contingent on a contradictory notion of natural and native, then its political ideology, as it works through the medium of the state and governance, is much more complex. As different scholars have already

addressed a variety of problems within liberalism as politics, I shall review those concerning the state, civil society, the public sphere, and labor, which are the concepts whose contradictory relations I examine in subsequent chapters. The three contradictions outlined by Stuart Hall, the queries raised by multiculturalism as represented by the work of Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka, and the nature of Creole and mestizo societies each will assist me in traveling between two distinct forms of liberalism: one in central nations and the other in peripheral societies.

All of the crucial problems of liberalism seem to emanate from a need to make the natural individual and his freedom the keystone of the philosophies of rights, the founding agent of democracy, and the pivot around whose needs and desires market exchanges turn. Consequently, it is urgent that we work out the relation of the individual and the social—what liberals call communal or group interests—and that of freedom and equality in relation to the state. Only in this way will we come to understand the cogency of this totalizing system, or lack thereof, and examine what Benjamin Arditì has so appropriately called “politics on the edges of liberalism” or liberalism’s underside: “a gray zone of phenomena where one is tempted to suspend the qualifier ‘liberal’ when describing politics, or at least where it is difficult to assert unambiguously that what happens within it is governed by a liberal code alone . . . a zone where experimentation with political innovation questions the liberal consensus. The ‘edges’ . . . refer to phenomena that either push the envelope of liberalism to seek to go against and beyond it.”²⁶

Part of these edges are constituted by the class character of liberalism, which is connected from the very beginning. Hall argues that liberalism is not tied to any particular class interest, although not one but two revolutions came about as a result of the Civil War of 1640 in England: one won civil, political, and economic rights for the new men of property, the Whigs (as the wars of independence won those rights for the *criollos* in Latin America at the beginning of the nineteenth century); the other revolution placed less emphasis on property and was designed to eliminate poverty and social injustice. The two strands exist simultaneously within liberalism, and liberalism emerges as an arena of struggle. Hall notes,

Liberalism actually emerged as a contested space already divided into its more conservative and its more radical tendencies—a tension which has been repeated again and again throughout its history. Depending on which tendency was the dominant one, liberalism could be articulated to the demands of different social strata. . . . Both conservative and radical tendencies were premised on the fundamentally liberal concepts of individual liberties and rights and a conception of society as an association of free and rational persons bound by contract and consent. The quarrel between those who saw good government as the extension and the preservation of their property and those who saw liberty as the end of “one rule for the rich and one for the poor” was a quarrel between different classes initially within liberalism.²⁷

The debate on multiculturalisms, multinationalisms, and difference thrives on this idea and digs profoundly into the tensions within liberalism, insisting on the principle of universal human rights for those individuals classified under the rubric of special-interest groups or communities.

THREE PRIMORDIAL TENSIONS AT THE HEART OF LIBERALISM

Stuart Hall identifies three tensions within liberalism that bear witness to the severe stretch and strain to which the system is subjected in its efforts to iron out contradictory ideas or oppositions. The first tension is between freedom and collaboration, the second tension is between freedom and equality, and the third is between *laissez-faire* and a welfare state. After being slightly rephrased by different multicultural scholars, these tensions appear as: (1) those between individual and communal or group interests, (2) those between freedom and equality (this tension remains the same), and (3) those between a strong state and a noninterventionist state. These three tensions enable us to distinguish the different strands of liberalism—radical, conservative, and social democratic—and thus understand the difference between the communalist and the procedural approaches to liberalism.

Tension 1: Between the Individual and the Communal or Group Interests

The tension between individual and group needs follows from a distinction between freedom and collaboration. This distinction is fundamental to liberalism as it negotiates the radical difference between group interests and needs and societal interests and needs. The essential divide here is that whereas *societal* putatively refers to the whole society, groups are understood as special-interest associations of individuals that stand paradoxically separate from the whole. Within multiculturalism, group interests are understood as ethnic, gender, or difference interests, which appear disengaged from the interests of the society as a whole. They are interests that, while existing within the social, only belong to portions, segments, and parts of the society and might therefore impinge upon the rights of others. A problem emerges immediately in that group interests are not defined as common interests, but rather as partial and special interests. Thus, if we take *group* to mean society as a whole, then we are not operating within liberalism. But, the problem is more complicated still, as the existence of groups that are within, but not of, the society not only posits a tension between freedom and collaboration, but is also the essence of discrimination (understood as unequal civil rights, an example of the divide between naturals and natives), denoting an illiberal locus of liberal societies—a catchesis. The tension between freedom and collaboration underpins the discussion of multiculturalism and therefore constitutes the foundation for the debate between procedural and communitarian and between conservative and social democratic forms of liberalism.

Furthermore, the idea of the individual and the idea of the group—implicit in the first tension, between freedom and collaboration—are antithetical, which constitutes the overlaying tension that subtends the philosophy of liberalism as a political ideology. Charles Taylor has worked amply on this subject. In his work he examines this question by referring to the relationship between public and political spheres. In his article “Politics and the Public Sphere,” Taylor takes on the concepts of private, public, and political spheres and attempts to demonstrate how the three remain separated in principle.²⁸ However, in so doing he underscores the tension produced by this separation.

The tensions between public and private thus arise from the contradictions of a theory predicated on the freedom of the individual, which now has to explain how and where individuals interact with each other and how they seek the common good. The main strategy to solve these seemingly opposing principles—the individual and the communal (which are never conceived as group interests)—has been to think of a happy medium, a medium endowed with a certain autonomy, a space for free public interaction. Civil society is such a happy medium. Taylor understands *civil society* to mean “the host of free associations, existing outside of any official sponsorship, and often dedicated to ends which we generally consider nonpolitical. . . . But civil society . . . exists where beyond these multiple associations, or through their combination, society can operate as a whole outside the ambit of the state. I mean by this ways in which society can be said to act, or to generate or sustain a certain condition, without the agency of government.”²⁹ Thus, in contrast to the state, which is the sphere of the political, civil society is the field of play for the realization of individual self-interest. Civil society is thus defined as a privileged domain beyond the reach and regulation of the state. The three major zones of civil society are (1) the private, domestic world of the family, (2) the market as the arena of free and contractual economic activity, and (3) the domain of voluntary social and political association.

The two major components of civil society are the public sphere and the market, which together constitute the arena for individual expression of the public. The public sphere is “a common space in which the members of the society are deemed to meet through a variety of media: print, electronic, and also face-to-face encounters; to discuss matters of common interest; and thus to be able to form a common mind about these things.”³⁰ The public sphere is that real, metaphoric, or virtual space of discussion where individuals can agree: that is, reach consensus on matters pertaining to their common good. Markets then follow as the “perfect instrument of such a system because, in market society, central economic decisions . . . result from the impersonal movement of prices reflecting the push and pull of forces of demand and supply which arise from a multitude of individual decisions and wills.”³¹ Thus, individual (human) rights, as well as political and civil, are matched by a vig-

orous economic liberalism in which competition (which to me is the expression of individual freedom in action) is the governing principle. This is a materialistic and utilitarian conception of the economic and the political grounded in the calculus of rationally pursued self-interest and advantage. And here we must stop and reflect on the multiple meanings of the public, for it is in the public sphere where the tensions between the individual and the communal are played out.

First of all, the public is simply that which is not private. If in the private sphere individuals reign supreme and are in full command of their rights and freedoms, in public they must abide by the rules and procedures of reason constituted into law. The public is thus an intermediary zone, a corridor connecting the private and the state, a space paradoxically construed as within, yet simultaneously outside, the political. In this space individuals are free to exchange all kinds of goods and ideas, provided they follow the rules, procedures, and protocols established for interactions between individuals and for public interaction: this is the meaning of reason as instrumental. The public is, in this sense, an arena of exchange (of goods, ideas, opinions), and the societal interactions of individuals in public are hence on the one hand market interactions and, on the other, political interactions. From this we can gather that the economic always underwrites the notion of the public. This gloss on the fundamental principles of liberalism leaves us here with three outstanding questions that will be taken on in the subsequent chapters of this text: (1) Is individualism construed differently in the private and the public spheres? (2) Are the rules and procedures of public discussion restricted to the public sphere, or do they extend to the private?³² (3) Is reason merely instrumental?

The bridge between the individual and the collective is the public sphere. Liberal society, “one which is trying to realize in the highest possible degree certain goods or principles of right . . . [and] trying to maximize the goods of freedom and collective self-rule, in conformity with a rule of right founded on equality,” thus holds on to the notion of the individual and his or her human rights because that is the keystone of a theory of markets—of the open exchange of goods and ideas.³³ This theory of markets, in turn, has to propose a theory of the societal in order to introduce politics (law and order) into exchange. This

is what Hegel called the transition from civil into political society (the state) mediated by labor in the abstract. Here we come into another conundrum within liberal philosophy: namely, the relation between all the spheres of liberalism—markets, labor, public sphere, civil society, and the state.

The key issue for us now is that no matter how we look at any of the articulations of liberal democratic principles, we are always confronted with the problem of the individual and the collective, of the private and the public, of civil society, public sphere, states, and markets. In this section we are trying to unravel the paradoxical relationship between the individual and the communal, which is another way of stating the relationship between freedom and governance. So is governance—political society—really the end point of this discussion? Hegel seems to think so: the apex of his philosophy is the state. Considered from this point of view, it seems, in all fairness, that in the public sphere civil and natural rights are at odds with each other, because whereas civil rights invoke the social, natural rights favor the individual. And civil and individual rights are not the same, although they are usually thought of as one. The designation of natural comes first; it comes from birth and is essentially ahistorical and asocial (a truly neutral ground). The designation of civil, on the other hand, is essentially political, a fiduciary form, the product of communal living and voluntary surrendering, and related to the state. From here it seems only logical to conclude that in the political philosophy of liberalism, individual human rights are first made to be coterminous with civil rights, and subsequently with political rights—law and order. This is the bedrock upon which civilization, state rule, and political society stand.

To solve the tension between the individual and the communal, then, the mediation of the state is necessary. The argument goes as follows. Through a focused public discussion, free individuals become of one mind. Consensus is that mechanism by means of which everyone speaks with one voice. Hence, through consensus the tension between the individual and the community relaxes. In the public sphere, dialogical reason turns freedom into consensual (and hegemonic) governance. Thus, the tension between the individual and the communal is solved in governance. Political society is, as Hegel upheld, the resolution of all the tensions within liberalism.

Now the question is: governance by whom? And the answer is: governance by the same individuals who have come to an agreement in their public discussions on matters concerning their common good. And, here again is where semantic problems become political and ideological queries, as, for good or for ill, the notion of the public tends to become coterminous with the communal—all the individuals becoming one individual. Common interests give rise to laws that emanate from the orderly exchange of words, from procedural (reasonable) discussions over matters of interests to all. These discussions are, in principle, devoid of all spirit of partisanship and related to the issues at hand. Group and party interests are considered negatively and thought of as antithetical to the communal. The social contract has a compelling character, which is constitutionally stated in the rule of law. Managing the notion of the public, then, entails considering the individual as a member of a social community; although the public is the medium to express common concerns and forge agreement on issues of common interests, under no circumstances ought it be confused with the societal. Trouble arises when one has in mind altogether different referents while employing these terms.

For me, this is one way of going over the logic of the system, to experience the ways in which every core concept connotes the other concepts and to reveal how all of these terms together constitute a closed and self-referential system. This is also a way of deducing a logic that departs from the concept of entrenched individual rights and ends in the rule of law and judicial action—a way of understanding the public and the political, and of moving from abstract philosophical principle into concrete political action. No liberal theoretician would disagree with these statements except when confronted with what are referred to as group rights (or interests), which in the societal context of central nations are the human rights of ethnic communities, special-interest groups, and gender. I will elaborate on this point later, but for the moment, it stands to reason to conclude that the public sphere is the vehicle enabling communal or societal formation and which thus takes the individual off center within the frame of a liberal state. Could we then provisionally conclude that in public, the tension between the individual and the communal is resolved when the individual and the communal become one?

I know liberal theoreticians will accept this logical consequence momentarily: if and when people reach an agreement and are of one mind, the individual is realized collectively. The caveat resides in making an unbridgeable distinction between the societal communal and the group communal. We are therefore compelled to conclude that some people belong to the societal communal and others to the group communal. The next question is, does not the societal communal constitute a group? Liberal thinkers will be reluctant to admit this, for admitting it is tantamount to accepting that liberalism is truly a group philosophy, a particularism based on the time-honored homogeneity of its members and their communal or group interests. Therefore, to avoid this dilemma, they create a series of infinite mediations that never allow the individual to be superseded by a group or a community. Nonetheless, and in a contradictory fashion, they readily accept that there are groups: that is, that there are certain people that either identify themselves or are identified by others as a community, and that these communities are differentiated by race, by gender, or by sexual orientation, among other traits. The result is that these groups stand separate and apart from the political society, from the state. It is logical, then, to conclude that what liberalism fails to accommodate is not the relation between the individual and the collective, but rather equality-in-difference.

This brings us to another problem that liberal philosophers have to explain: the inside/outside of power that the categories of public sphere and the market enjoin. Civil society, we are told, is separate from the state. Civil society and the state are two different domains. One cannot be confused or taken in by the other. The unstated corollary is that civil society is the terrain that guarantees that human associations are pre-, extra-, or apolitical, because the public space in which they occur is defined as neutral. Neutrality, however, does not account for the fact that such social exchange presumes at least some pattern of public maintenance, rules, and procedures that are well established and agreed upon—in most cases, the rule of law. If public space is the space where people come together, we must ask: What are the preconditions for this space to exist? What are the conditions of possibility of drawing rooms, coffee houses, salons, trade unions, newspapers, novels, print capitalism, games, movie the-

aters, and even friendships and affect? How should one think about them without invoking the presence of private property and the law—matters of “common interest” that need consent and agreement?

It is clear that the public sphere is “the locus of discussion potentially engaging everyone . . . in which the society can come to a common mind about important matters.” It is clear, too, that critical debate produces a common mind. However, it is not clear how civil society “is an association which is constituted by nothing outside of the common action we carry out in it”; how it is “a discourse of reason outside power, which nevertheless is normative for power.” And it is still less clear how the extrapolitical status in which all the members of a political society “should be seen as also forming a society outside the state,” when “it is true that in a functioning public sphere, action at any time is carried out within structures laid down earlier” in a “de facto arrangement of things” that “does not enjoy any privilege over the action carried out within it.” My interest, then, is in how public debate can be disengaged from partisanship and devoid of social conflict, and therefore ultimately in the relationship between conflict and freedom. We can think about these ideas in abstract forms only if we think about them philosophically, not politically. The moment we state that the public sphere and the public opinion it generates play “a crucial role in [the public sphere’s] self-justification as a free self-governing society, that is, a society in which (a) people form their opinions freely—both as individuals and in coming to a common mind, and (b) these common opinions matter: they in some way take effect on or control government,” we are talking politics.³⁴

The systemic problems always boil down to the same paradox: arguing for individual human rights while explaining society’s formation, existence, and rule of law. Freedom, the most central of human rights, is then construed as always subordinated to consensus in order to achieve the common good. The individual is always subordinated to the social—or the private to the public, as liberalism likes to call it. In liberalism, this subordination of the individual-private to the collective-public is mediated or attenuated through the construction of the public sphere as a public space for discussion. Freedom exists in the public sphere, and this freedom is what allows for the rule of law. The

public individual is not subordinated to government, power, or the state; on the contrary, the state, government, and power are subordinated to the individual, provided the individual speaks with one collective voice. Government is always, in theory, responsive and responsible to public opinion, which means “(1) to be the product of reflection, (2) to emerge from discussion, and (3) to reflect an actively produced consensus.”³⁵ However, the increasing overlap and conflation of the major zones of civil society that characterizes corporate rule provide the ground for Foucault’s and Deleuze’s proposition of the withering of civil society. The new social movements also contend that the logic of corporate society is ever encroaching on the procedural, impartial nature of state regulations. This is another pressure that philosophers of liberalism have brought to bear on the system.

Tension 2: Between Freedom and Equality: Minority/Majority Rights

Tension number two refers to the relation between freedom and equality. The problem here is that although by law all individuals are equal subjects, equality is a value derived from freedom and natural rights. Individual freedom presides over all others, equality included. This is the general idea of Anatole France’s famous ironic dictum that anyone is free to sleep under a bridge at night if he so wishes. In constitutional democracies, everybody is free and equal to pursue his or her own egotistic self-interest, while competing with others with equal chances. But not all obtain the same results; some succeed while others fail. Why? That is what multicultural philosophies want to explore. The theory of the survival of the fittest is not sufficient, because the discussion is no longer situated in the natural but in the political. Tension number 2 thus refers to the paradox of how a basically egalitarian posture generates unequal positions. Legally, the question is: must the law be mute before inequality but not before freedom? Indeed, the law leaves the difference between formally abstract and concretely substantive equality unspecified. The law offers formal and systematic public criteria: neutral procedures. It also maintains fairness, secures contracts, protects individual rights, because “the business of the laws . . . is not to provide for the truth of opinions but for the safety and security of the com-

monwealth and of every particular man's goods and persons."³⁶ The key word is *neutrality*, because it constitutes the substantial divide between minority and majority constituencies. In democratic societies, majority rules.

The distinction between equality and freedom moves indistinctly from the domain of political philosophy to that of political economy, as equality is discussed first in terms of whether or not the state should intervene in defining a good life as the common good. Here the divide is between the good life and the common good. The good life is a private prerogative and an individual right, while the common good is the consensual agreement reached by all of the individuals composing the society to create a state. The catch is that the state must not interfere with the former but rather must create procedures for the latter. This tension marks the locus of another important divide between communal- and procedure-oriented scholars of liberalism, or Walzer's two kinds of liberalism. Whereas communitarians believe states must intervene in the definition of a good life for all, proceduralists think procedures suffice. Communitarian liberals call for a social-democratic and welfare form of state, while proceduralists support a more neoliberal type of noninterventionist state, which operates according to *laissez-faire*, *laissez-aller* policies.

One of the most pressing tasks of the philosophies of liberalism is to explain why there are disadvantaged minority communities and why minority groups do not fare as well in the equal market of opportunities. This is the crux of tension number 2, between freedom and equality. In *Liberalism, Community and Culture*, Will Kymlicka addresses this and, as a good liberal theoretician, subsumes all human rights into the rights of the individual and subordinates "minority rights" to individual rights—a very reductionist stance.³⁷ His subtext in this move is the question of how to manage the recognition of injustice, the battering of a vast array of cultures, the lopsided (misadjusted and maladjusted) lifeways that are characteristic of cultures created by the confrontation between freedom and equality. In our case, I instead propose to confront this tension in terms of how to accept the role of cultural membership (or citizenship). In relation to this interrogation, it is also legitimate to wonder if people have an interest in ensuring the continuation of their own culture when other types of culture are available for purchase in the market, or if they are ready

to exchange their own cultural idiosyncrasies for the sake of integrating into larger and more powerful societies where the state is ready to make a substantial social investment in homogenizing cultures. For, as Kymlicka acknowledges, there is no doubt that cultural minorities have a distinct legal and political status and that within the liberal theory of equal rights, they have the right to develop their distinct cultural lives, however much these cultural lives present themselves as a liability to the “universal” mode of being and the pursuit of “the good life.”

As I explained in the previous section, in principle liberal theoreticians oppose special status for any collectivity or minority group (culture) on the grounds of a conflict of interest between individual and collective rights. Any proposal which limits individual rights for the sake of collective rights will never be supported by liberalism. There seems to be zero tolerance within the moral ontology of this system for the idea of collectivities, other than its own. The problem is that, from a minority standpoint, the defense of individual rights takes the form of a confrontation between majority and minority rights. Liberals’ championing of individual rights is viewed as a pretext to defend the rights of majority groups. Minority groups, in whatever ways they are formulated—be it in terms of ethnicity, gender, or disability—have already accrued lengthy and important bibliographies that prove that the concept of the individual does not apply to everyone equally. The individual, far from being a universal concept, is a very particular perception contingent upon availability of and access to collective decisions. Minorities are always seen as a group. Therefore, group (cultural) membership, a new term liberal theoreticians have to contend with, must play a role in the public discussion of human rights. The successful strategy here lies in the definition of majority and minority, since, in a democracy, the majority rules.

One important point that carries over in this discussion is to understand that minority rights usually refer more to rights of nondiscrimination rather than to special treatment for different cultures. This clarification is necessary because the struggle for cultural rights creates the impression of a petition for special rights. In fact, the case for minority rights argues against the special rights of majority groups. Cultural rights expose the existence of a double stan-

dard of governance, one for majorities (defined as the common good) and the other for special-interest groups. At issue here is a need to secure equal opportunities for the members of these minority groups, as well as a more supple type of basic liberties to redress inequalities and to compensate for what historically has been taken away from them, thus leveling the field of play. What we need is a historicization of liberalism that will allow us to understand why so-called cultural minorities do not fare as well as so-called cultural majorities.

The continued existence of minority communities may require societal restrictions of choice, as well as differentials in opportunity, unless liberalism stands for unequal forms of citizenship and unequal access to a common field of opportunity. If such differentials of opportunity are not in place, then some minority cultures are endangered cultures. Liberalism has to stop viewing aboriginal rights as matters of discrimination or privilege and begin thinking of them as matters of equality. The rights of minority cultures cannot continue to be theorized as in competition with liberalism but as an essential component of liberal political practices.

This distinction exposes the real problem facing liberalism today: the question of past offenses, and liberalism's need, therefore, to seriously consider a theory of equities. Here, damage repair must play an essential role in redressing former inequalities, as otherwise liberalism can never completely fulfill its tenets to become a true doctrine of universal individual rights. Furthermore, this means seriously questioning the aporias of liberalism, which currently resolve themselves by means of addenda and theoretical caveats, in concepts such as peripheral development, or traditional or so-called premodern cultures. It is thus also necessary to question the need to restrict, regulate, and control freedoms that endanger the very existence of the minority community or communities.

Otherwise, to accept these aporias of liberalism is tantamount to accepting that liberalism requires the practice of some illiberal measures, making it an unviable concept. Kymlicka addresses this when he argues that "liberal values require both individual freedom of choice and a secure cultural context from which individuals can make their choices." For instance, Kymlicka states that liberal values require the liberalization of certain things, making acceptable the previously unacceptable, as with homosexuality and ethnic and gender rights.

That is to say, broadening the tolerance of choice is a way of defending minority rights and liberalism simultaneously, and thus everything does not depend on our ability as individuals to make our own way in the modern world of seemingly unlimited possibilities. On the contrary, much depends on the existence of a “structure of social understanding which points out the dangers and limits of the resources at our disposal.”³⁸

Defenders of liberalism must realize that the concepts of liberalism have been heretofore understood within the politics of cultural homogeneity. In this case, liberalism is simply the hegemonic cultural structure of overdeveloped societies. The pressing question for liberalism today is to consider the historical role of other social and cultural formations, many of them devalued by the dominant society, and the role they play within liberalism, as well as to recognize that liberalism has already done away with many of them. Here, notions of the heterogeneous and the nondialogical, such as they have been systematized by scholars from around the world (in Latin America, primary examples include the works of Antonio Cornejo Polar, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Ralph Premdas, and others), gain relevance.³⁹ The issue is, then, how to liberalize liberalism with respect to minority cultures, which seems to be the agenda of multicultural and postcolonial scholars. This agenda is predicated upon the revision of the past and the confrontation of liberal fears of disintegration upon contact with the outside.

Here the value of literature emerges in full force. Literature has long documented the disparities of rights between peoples as they are glossed over by governments in the name of philosophical principles and abstractions. Oral and testimonial literatures, diaries, and letters, in particular, are literary forms readily available to those disenfranchised by the state. However, transferring such representations to other arenas of discourse can be difficult. If and when the representations of the civic rights of culture are taken out of literature and placed into the arena of law, they immediately trouble legislatures, as they hold the state responsible for the relegation of the civic and human rights of these people. When philosophers discuss these rights publicly, the question of minority or cultural rights also weakens the pillars upon which hegemony and its vehicle, high culture, perch.

Several points can serve as guidelines in discussing the tension between freedom and equality. One is the notion of the individual as a purposive, conscious agent, someone who is accountable and who serves as a carrier of values. Another is the idea of self-respect, which John Rawls defines as the feeling that one's plan of life is worth pursuing.⁴⁰ A third one is the idea of choice. What would be the consequences of changing or losing one's values, of applying Rawls's principle to minority rights, to consider the context of choice? The variables are so complex that we always return to the distinction between homogeneous and heterogeneous societies. In homogeneous societies, every application of choice is easier, even visible. For instance, choices occur within cultural structures. In fact, the only meaningful options are provided by cultural structures, to the extent that this calls into question the notion of choice itself; we are not able to discern, in some instances, if changes occur *because* of the choices made or *despite* the choices made. Along these same lines, we must also consider whether the individual agent is well equipped to understand the consequences of his or her own choices. Another item of importance is the problem of devalued cultures, or those that find it difficult to sustain self-respect. In these cases, their context of choice and their capacity to produce localities—to build the institutions, forms of organization, and social relations we associate with the liberal state—is severely impaired. Devalued cultures find themselves in a protracted war with dominant or valued cultures. Their members can make use of role models to avoid despondency, escapism, and cynicism.

Tension 3: Between a Strong State and a Noninterventionist State

Tension number 3 refers the relationship between strong and noninterventionist states. Paradoxically, liberalism is a multilayered system that begins with individual freedom and ends with state coercion, which is chosen voluntarily as a collective necessity and condition for an organized social life. Coercion is simply a procedure against those who break the consensus. However, there are two different ways of conceiving the organization of society through the state: communal liberalism argues that the strong competitiveness of human nature requires the establishment of a strong state; procedural liberalism believes the

state should meddle as little as possible in the societal affairs. The more classical the conception of liberalism, the more limited the intervention of the state in the affairs of people. Neoliberalism is the postmodern expression of the most classical form of liberalism.

Tension number 3 is expressed in the two kinds of liberalism outlined by Walzer above, as well as by Hall in his premise of a contested liberalism: that is, one concerned with social justice on one hand, and with the protection of property and different rules for the rich and for the poor on the other. Basically, the tension is between the argument that “a good liberal (or social democratic) state enhances the possibilities for cooperative coping” and the argument for a classical liberal state that does not. Walzer’s point of departure is John Dewey’s communitarian criticism, which he shared with his contemporary pluralist critics, for whom “the state is not ‘only an umpire to avert and remedy trespasses of one group upon another’ but also ‘renders the desirable association solidier and more coherent. . . . It places a discount upon injurious groupings and renders their tenure of life precarious . . . [and] it gives the individual members of valued associations greater liberty and security; it relieves them of hampering conditions. It enables individual members to count with reasonable certainty upon what others will do.’” However, these ideas are “constrained by the constitutional establishment of individual rights, which are themselves . . . not so much recognitions of what individuals by nature are or have as expressions of hope about what they will be and do. Unless individuals act together in certain ways, state action of the sort that Dewey recommended cannot get started.”⁴¹

Walzer moves on to discuss the nature the non-neutral state, which he understands in republican terms as the provider of “much of the substance of contemporary communitarian politics.” However, his contention is that neither Dewey nor John Rawls would recognize such notions as the public or the social union as versions of republicanism, if only because “republicanism . . . is an integrated and unitary doctrine in which energy and commitment are focused primarily on the political realm. It is a doctrine adapted (in both its classical and neoclassical forms) to the needs of small, homogeneous communities, where civil society is radically undifferentiated.”⁴² This particular version of the state thus identifies liberalism with representative government, but not with univer-

sal democracy. And, with liberalism here caught between its competing ambitions, we see the confluence of the underlying tensions discussed above, as the philosophy struggles to cope with individuals and groups, freedom and equality, and the role of the state in mediating their respective roles.

PLURAL SOCIETIES AND CREOLE SOCIETIES

The use of the term *plural* by Dewey's critical group allows me to move into the different ways liberal pluralism is interpreted. In contrast to Western societies ("A" societies), in which multiculturalism constitutes an internal obstruction or an opposition to the presumed notion of homogeneity, in Creole societies ("B" societies), the term *plural* presumes a model type where heterogeneity is the norm and where race, class, and color play a major role in structuring group relations across the social spectrum.

These societal models, A and B, represent two extremes, and the current question today is how these two will adjust to one another: that is to say, whether postcolonial societies can move from model B to model A, despite the effects of colonization and colonialism, or if, as one of the effects of the politics of globalization, type A societies have already been or are rapidly becoming type B societies. Scholars of multiculturalism are invested in studying the possibilities within this evolution and in proposing models of individual, civil, and state interaction to illustrate the kind of modifications that liberalism can accommodate. The bone of contention here is the role of race, class, and color in the maintenance of social order and respect for human rights. Thus the question is essentially twofold: on the one hand, it is posed as an ethical question, hinging on the question of natural rights, while on the other it is a political question, regarding either the implementation of social justice or the maintenance of law and order.

The first distinction to make is between the concept of plural, Creole societies and that of American pluralism, as they are two very distinct ideological regimes. American pluralism presumes consensus, order, and cohesion between different social groups, with one scale of values at the apex accepted by the majority. I have already discussed above how the presupposition of one value

system for all has created tensions between groups and communities, curtailed consensus, and sparked a discussion on homogeneity that renders liberalism a particularism. This means that the consensus within plural type A societies is solely an ideology, a fantasy. As such, homogeneity of race, class, and ethnicity becomes the sole condition for the practice of truly liberal democratic regimes or imagined liberalism. To think otherwise is to speak about “mixtures,” “edges,” and “internal peripheries,” gray zones where mainstream and edges meet. These gray zones in turn “confront liberalism with its ‘unthought,’ defy the common sense belief that our politics is unquestionably liberal, or spearhead political interventions that move into less liberal or even post-liberal scenarios.”⁴³

The pluralism of Creole societies (type B societies), on the other hand—which I will follow as the model for Latin American societies—stresses such difference, conflict, and distrust: those edges that for Arditì are always a “foreign internal territory,” that in Rancière’s formulation do not count, or that in the theorization of Deleuze and Guattari break away or depart from the existing code, to avoid being overcoded (stereotyped) and thus “becoming minoritarian.”⁴⁴ This type of social order is not based on consensus and does not share a central value system; it is sharply sundered by ethnicity. Order is maintained by the monopoly over political power held by one segment of the society, and generally by force, control, and coercion. There is no choice; there is no, or very little, crossing of the color line, either by marriage, education, or trade. This rule by force imposes domination, in sharp contrast to hegemony and its rule by consent. Such rule by force can be understood by looking at all the institutional subsystems of the society, such as kinship structures, family types, education, and occupation, and examining how these systems interact with each other. Sheer numbers and head counting could indicate the degree of consensus and domination and forecast tendencies toward destabilization and restructuring of societies. For instance, in Jamaica, “four-fifths of [the] society is ‘black’, nine-tenths of the rest is coloured, ‘of mixed ancestry’, and tiny minorities are white, Chinese, East Indian, Syrian, Jewish and Portuguese.”⁴⁵ Similar proportions in the race, ethnic, and class composition of Latin American societies could serve as the ground for the discussion of Latin American versions of the politics of pluralism.

In considering such a “plural (Creole) society,” Stuart Hall brings up three criticisms. The first is the fact that in Caribbean and Latin American societies, “the patterns of race/colour stratification, cultural stratification and class-occupational stratification overlap” and are “massively over-determined”—that is, there is little or no upward mobility if you belong to an oppressed race group. The second is that “the ‘plural society’ model blurs the distinction between parallel or horizontal, and vertical or hierarchical segmentation”—color lines are arbitrarily drawn. The third is “that the overall cohesion of the society is achieved via the domination of one segment, by coercion in the political-institutional order”—that is, politics does not work via common consent.⁴⁶

Hall is right to point out that the plural society model stresses plurality in cultural values at the cost of overlooking the structures of legitimation and of displacing the historicity of the structure upon which Western liberalism rests. Hall’s task, then, as well as our own, is to rehistoricize this structure and to remember that such social structures are laid down in slave or *encomienda* societies. It is within the plantation/*encomienda* systems that race, color, and class (or caste) status was established as the legitimate structure. It is already a truism that “the whole idiomatic framework of ‘normative degradations’ is cast by the syntax of slave [and *encomienda*] society.”⁴⁷ All previous cultural and ideological structures of African and American indigenous societies were broken, and they persisted only through accommodations—the so-called acculturations, transculturations, *mestizajes*, and hybridities—that Latin American thinkers theorize. Therefore, all postcolonial cultural institutions result from this domination or “normative degradation,” and thus the theoretical idioms above merely signal the adaptation of a differentiated but single socioeconomic world system, not plural segments of equal cultures. These so-called pluralities were, in fact, only articulated differently, with their political and ideological function being to highlight the hierarchies and to deepen the divide. In spite of all of this, could we accept Hall’s idea that “the most profound alternative cultural process to cultural domination...is creolization,” or in the Latin American case, *mestizaje*?⁴⁸ That is something to ponder, and a discussion of this possibility is currently under way in the Andean bibliographies, where Indianness, rather than whiteness, receives most of the emphasis of the mixture invoked

in *mestizaje*, hybridity, and acculturation.⁴⁹ That is the context and content of the term *heterogeneous*, after Antonio Cornejo Polar.⁵⁰

In postcolonial, Creole, plural societies, legally enforced ethnic and racial barriers are currently undergoing a process of erosion. This, in turn, allows a transition between caste and class, enabling a new “colored” or mestizo population to gain some political prominence. This is an indication of social mobility across the border of difference, although the new acculturated or assimilated individuals rarely surpass the lower rungs of occupations and professions, thus testifying to the subterranean stability of social stratification and the considerable economic, political, and cultural power that white minorities wield. However, the profound meaning of these new mestizos and “colored” is that they succeed to the degree that they ape the language, dress, educational manners, and values of whites—hence the term *acculturation*. In this way, a sort of consensus arises, but one that here comes to honor the perennial overlapping of race, color, and class and testifies to the unshakable barriers and the inflexibility of the structure. Even when whites lose their political grip on these societies, they hold a great degree of economic power; they represent the absent paradigm and ideal value system, and they are bearers of profoundly internalized social symbolisms which are the source of the system’s own legitimation. Any white person stands in for the system and validates the hierarchical structure. These multiply articulated mixtures make such systems among the most complex on earth. Thus, as Ralph Premdas claims, “Transferred to the Third World . . . this [liberal democratic] framework that has been so successful in Britain is the cause of a nightmare of unending ongoing difficulties. Not the least of these problems has stemmed from the multiethnic unintegrated cultural structure of the Third World environment.”⁵¹ This structural tendency suffers from local variations, yet, as a tendency, it remains steady.

LIBERALISM, *DERECHOS DE GENTES*, AND POSTCOLONIAL SCHOLARSHIP

In the discussion of multiculturalism, which is the rubric under which Western democratic societies debate the human rights of non-Western peoples, or

equality-in-difference, we can distinguish at least four different problems pointed out by scholars of colonialism, which will be rehearsed in the analysis of concrete cultural situations that ensues. These problems are: (1) the restricted frame of reference, (2) the fallacy of the argument, (3) the definition of identity and culture, and (4) the historical legacy of colonialism.

Let us begin with the first problem, the restricted frame of reference. As we have seen, liberal democratic scholars from the West tend to depart from the Hegelian premise that liberal Western democracies, and the states they organize, are the ultimate goal of human political development. The extensive discussion on the premises of liberalism outlined above is the strong and irrefutable point of departure. Instead, the apex of political development becomes the rule of law, representative government, a regime of entrenched rights, and the guarantees of certain freedoms. These principles constitute the fundamental frame of discussion, and the frame is nonnegotiable. This frame already restricts the discussion to an epistemological space that is severely and radically contested by the presence of national groups (indigenous peoples) that were involuntarily incorporated, and by migrant groups that voluntarily come to the ambit of Western nations. These groups give the nation its multicultural character.

However, making the distinction between peoples and characterizing them as indigenous groups and peoples of foreign descent (minority people) severely cuts into the universal character of liberalism, revealing it as a particularistic doctrine predicated on a homogenous and historically organic group. The tell-tale sign is the concept of difference. The universal predication of liberalism comes to a full halt when dealing with people considered different—different from what? In this regard, multiculturalism names a contention and calls, at the very least, for a discussion, if not a modification, adjustment, reconsideration, or clarification, of the principles of liberalism. On this account, multiculturalism and postcolonialism share the situational privilege of inhabiting a multiframed universe, the famous in-betweens or third space so much advocated by Homi Bhabha. This condition brings us inside a field that is permanently destabilized and defamiliarized. It is a case of what Russian formalists called *ostranenie*—estrangement—and what Arditì identified as the “underside”: a symptom, meaning “the return of the repressed,” a metaphor intended to signify “the notion of internal periphery, one that is designed to capture the peculiar

status of an outside that belongs, but not properly so,” because “the distinction between inside and outside is a matter of dispute and cannot be thought outside a polemic.”⁵² Were we to call that difference “color,” the politics of color blindness or color specificity would constitute instances of defamiliarization or “undersidedness,” and symptoms that would come to bear on the main operative principles of liberalism, such as the state, law and order, civil society, public sphere, labor, markets, freedoms and rights. The same holds true for any other variable—gender, sexual preference, or culture.

This takes us directly to problem (2), the fallacy of the argument of the two positions within liberalism, with one defending the universal rights of man (human beings) and the other advocating the recognition of the particularities of groups—ethnic, migrant, national, gender, physically challenged—that is, the admission of the nonuniversality of human rights. The fallacy resides in glossing over the fact that the modern world is the product of colonialism. With colonialism, the illusion or fantasy of homogeneity comes to a sudden and final close. Therefore, there must be recognition of the double legacy of the modern in liberalism and colonialism: that is, the politics of equality and the politics of difference. Adjudicating difference to all but one group is merely bad faith. Thereby, in the same manner that Hegel’s vision of the political universe is a given in the discussion, so is the fact that whiteness, maleness, and bourgeois heterosexual rule is the measure of the individual and his rights. We are talking about particularisms, are we not? It is the policy of color blindness toward whites that subtends the use of politically charged vocabulary such as “particular ethnic groups” and “ethnic minorities,” and it is the policy of gender blindness that privileges men over women, as heterosexual blindness creates queerness. In other words, all of the groups subsumed under the rubric of difference or underprivilege receive this same treatment as essentially unequal.

Actually, we must cut to the chase and avoid the philosophical dilemmas in which the polemic about rights and equality is couched, and introduce into our purview what Charles Taylor in all candor considers the cruelest and most upsetting attack. His claim is that “the supposedly neutral set of difference-blind principles of the politics of equal dignity [rights and freedoms] is in fact a reflection of hegemonic culture. . . . The charge leveled by the most radical

forms of the politics of difference is that 'blind' liberalisms are themselves the reflection of particular cultures. And the worrying thought is that this bias might not just be a contingent weakness of all hitherto proposed theories, that the very idea of such a liberalism may be a kind of pragmatic contradiction, a particularism masquerading as the universal." We will do equally well to recognize that "the politics of difference grows organically out of the politics of universal dignity" and that it is the development of the modern and or postcolonial notions of identity that gives rise to the politics of difference.⁵³

Problem (3) involves the definition of identity and culture. Here we find a real snag. This is due to the fact that culture is defined in many different ways. It is one thing to speak about high culture: that is, production that is literary, cultured, written, haloed and hallowed, as modernism, the Frankfurt school, and Dinesh de Sousa defined it.⁵⁴ It is another to consider the concepts of culture that ensued from the so-called culture wars. In these debates of the late twentieth century, high culture was superceded by a more comprehensive, anthropological idea of culture. This was a debate carried forward into the multistranded versions of culturalisms espoused by cultural, subaltern, and postcolonial studies.

Last but not least, I turn to problem (4), the problem of history and the underside of modernity, which is the history of colonialism. Postcolonial historians and critics like Enrique Dussel and Walter Mignolo are meticulously examining the multiple articulations of Western, democratic, and liberal ways of thinking and being.⁵⁵ Little by little, they are filling the empty spaces of the modern/colonial debate and working on its genealogies. In the coming pages, I follow their lead.