Theorizing the "Modes of Incorporation": Assimilation, Hyphenation, and Multiculturalism as Varieties of Civil Participation*

Jeffrey C. Alexander

Yale University

In 1974, after 20 years of relatively successful struggles for the expansion of American citizenship, efforts that began with black Americans and expanded to include other racial minorities and women, a scholar named Peter Adler (1974:369–71) concluded a widely used anthology called *Intercultural Communication* by offering a definition of "multicultural." Emphasizing the "psychoculturally adaptive," Adler portrayed a protean, ever-changing, integrative actor who had the desire and ability to put himself in the shoes of the other person in a relativizing, crossover, nonjudgmental way. "Multicultural man," he wrote, "maintains no clear boundaries between himself and the varieties of personal and cultural contexts he may find himself in." He is "capable of major shifts in his frame of reference and embodies the ability to disavow a permanent character. . . . He is a person who is always in the process of becoming a part of and apart from a given cultural context. He is very much a formative being, resilient, changing, and evolutionary."

Fifteen years later, delivering her presidential address before colleagues at the Modern Language Association, the well-known feminist literary scholar Catherine Stimpson defined multiculturalism in a decidedly different manner. It means, she said (1992:43–44, italics added), "treating society as the sum of several equally valuable *but distinct* racial and ethnic groups." At that same meeting, the editor of the explicitly multicultural *Heath Anthology of American Literature* defended his textbook's race and gender organization of literary materials by insisting, "I know of no standard of judgment . . . which transcends the particularities of time and place . . . of politics in short" (Kimball 1992:75). In another scholarly presentation at the MLA, a Shakespearean scholar justified the need for a multicultural approach to literature by highlighting the boundedness of his own particular identity. Reading the work of a black woman author, he explained, "I do not enter into a transcendent human interaction but instead become more aware of my whiteness and maleness, social categories that shape my being" (Kimball 1992:69).

These juxtaposed quotations suggest more than a shift in intellectual reference from Eriksonian ego psychology to Foucaultian power-knowledge. They indicate a sea change in social understanding. In the early 1970s, "multicultural" connoted compromise, interdependence, a relativizing universalism, and an expanding intercultural community. In our own time, the same term appears to be ineluctably connected, not with permeability and commonality, but with "difference," with the deconstruction and deflation of claims to universalism, with the reconstruction, rehabilitation, and protection of apparently autonomous cultural discourses and separated interactional communities.

In the course of this transformation, a highly visible conservative intellectual reaction has crystallized that is deeply suspicious about the motives of multicultural activists and sharply skeptical of the new and very different program for intergroup relations they rec-

ommend. Arthur Schlesinger, Kennedy liberal and cosmopolitan thinker of an earlier day, blames multicultural activists for reviving "ancient prejudices" (Schlesinger 1991:15). Rather than seeing these thinkers as responding to continuing inequality and exclusion, Schlesinger claims that they have actually reintroduced divisions where none existed before. By "exaggerating differences," he writes, "the cult of ethnicity .... intensifies resentments and antagonisms" (p. 102), "producing a nation of minorities [and] inculcat[ing] the illusion that membership in one or another ethnic group is the basic American experience" (p. 112). In attacking multiculturalism as a new form of racial particularism, the conservative critics of multiculturalism claim that this movement has undermined the solidarity upon which American democracy depends. As Schlesinger sees it, a once united nation has now been torn apart. "The cult of ethnicity," he (1991:112) decries, "has reversed the movement of American history," and he condemns it for "breaking the bonds of cohesion—common ideals, common political institutions, common language, common culture, common fate—that hold the republic together" (p. 138). According to Kimball (1992:65), "what we are facing is nothing less than the destruction of the fundamental premises that underlie . . . a liberal democratic polity."

It is perplexing, but also highly revealing in a theoretical sense, that some of the most important intellectual advocates of multiculturalism actually seem to agree with such critics, suggesting that their movements are, in fact, destroying the American community. Their alternative normative ideal is a social system of insulated but equally empowered groups who, rather than experiencing some shared humanity and solidarity, would simply grant each other the right to pursue their distinctive and "different" lifestyles and goals. I propose to criticize this claim on empirical, theoretical, and normative grounds. I will propose an alternative model of incorporation in contemporary social systems, one that refers to the concept of "fragmented civil societies." After indicating how this approach casts the debate between multiculturalists and conservatives in a different light, I will operationalize it by presenting three ideal-typical models of out-group incorporation into fragmented civil societies. Comparing the contemporary focus on difference with incorporative regimes that emphasize assimilation and ethnic-hyphenation, I will argue that multiculturalism can be considered, not as a separating emphasis on separation, but as a new and more democratic mode of civil integration.

RECOGNITION WITHOUT SOLIDARITY?

The most important theoretical articulation of the radical multiculturalist position is Iris Marion Young's philosophical treatise *Justice and the Politics of Difference*.[1] Speaking as a feminist personally involved in the new social movements of the 1970s and 1980s, Young sees American and, indeed, modern democracies as neither cohesive "societies" nor real democracies. Rather, as Young explains it, modern democracies are composed simply of social "groups." These groups are defined by particularistic, primary identities—she mentions age, sex, race, ethnicity, gender, and religion—and they are always and inevitably organized in a hierarchical way, that is, composed of "social relations [which] are tightly defined by domination and oppression" (Young 1990:32–33). The groups that compose such a system are, implicitly or explicitly, engaged in endless and mortal conflict with each other, with the sole aim of enlarging the field for the expression of their identity interests.

On the basis of this empirical description of the contemporary social organization, Young attacks the very idea of "civic impartiality." The notion of an impartial "public"

[1] For this discussion of Young, I draw upon Alexander (1998).

sphere, she asserts, "masks the ways in which the particular perspectives of dominant groups claim universality" and actually "helps justify hierarchical decision-making structures."

With the hope for neutral territory and common understanding ruled out, Young links justice instead to the full expression of particularity and difference. "The good society," she writes, "does not eliminate or transcend group difference" (p. 163). To the contrary, "group differentiation is both an inevitable and a desirable aspect of modern social processes." For this reason, justice "requires not the melting away of differences, but institutions that promote *reproduction of and respect for* group differences without oppression" (p. 47, italics added). Young argues that recent social movements should be seen in just this way. She reads them simply as emphasizing difference and particularity—as identity movements in the contemporary social science sense—suggesting that the discourse of a radical, separatist multiculturalism is not only rational and morally legitimate but politically effective as well.

My problem with Young's argument is not with its logical coherence but with its empirical validity and its moral status, which are inextricably interwoven. Does Young have a realistic theory of the culture and institutional life of contemporary societies? Of how social movements for justice actually work? Young claims that "a selfish person who refused to listen to the expression of the needs of others will not himself be listened to" (p. 106). But isn't "selfishness"—the self-orientation produced by xenophobic, group-limited perception—exactly what Young herself has identified as the defining characteristic of contemporary social life? When socially marginalized and culturally polluted groups make claims for recognition and respect, can the simple assertion of these claims, in and of itself, change the minds of the dominant groups who have made them marginal and polluted? It seems highly unlikely that assertive argument could be so sufficient unto itself.

In the remainder of this article I will suggest a very different position. It is not the mere fact of energetic positive self-identification, much less the simple demand for deliberation, but the construction of the social context within which claims for recognition are made that determines whether the negative understanding of social differences—"stereotyping" in an earlier vocabulary—can be ameliorated or reversed. An impartial civil sphere does not necessarily rest upon the kind of undifferentiated, homogeneous, melted social values that conservatives recommend and radicals deplore.

THE FRAGMENTED CIVIL SPHERE

In order to substantiate this claim, we must redefine the object in relation to which claims for recognition are made. In order to do so, we must move from concepts like "society," "common values," and "community" to a notion of the "civil sphere." While there are famously different approaches to this now highly controversial concept, I understand it as a social sphere or field organized around a particular kind of solidarity, one whose members are symbolically represented as independent and self-motivating persons individually responsible for their actions, yet also as actors who feel themselves, at the same time, bound by collective obligations to all the other individuals who compose this sphere.[2] The existence of such a civil sphere suggests tremendous respect for individual capacities and

---

[2] I discuss my own take on this literature in Alexander (1998), where I also offer a more formal definition of civil society as "a solidary sphere in which a certain kind of universalizing community comes gradually to be defined and to some degree enforced. To the degree this solidary community exists, it is exhibited by 'public opinion,' possesses its own cultural codes and narratives in a democratic idiom, is patterned by a set of peculiar institutions, most notably legal and journalistic ones, and is visible in historically distinctive sets of interactional practices like civility, equality, criticism, and respect" (1998:7).

rationality and also a highly idealistic and trusting understanding of the goodwill of others. For how could we grant a wide scope for freedom of action and expression to unknown others—as the democratic notion of civil society implies—if we did not, in principle, trust in their rationality and goodwill? This trust in the goodwill of autonomous others is implied in the paradoxical proposition that the "free" members of civil society are at the same time solidaristic with each other. Insofar as such solidarity exists—and this is, of course, the problematic issue—we "see ourselves" in every other member of society. Imaginatively "taking the place of the other," our actions become simultaneously self-oriented yet controlled in some manner by extraindividual solidarity. In this way, we act simultaneously as members of a community and as rational, self-willed, autonomous individuals. The emergence of this kind of civil realm supersedes, but does not necessarily suppress, more particular commitments we feel as members of primary groups.

Such an idealistic vision of a civil social order has been a utopian aspiration of communities in different times and places, even while it has generated sharp tensions with other, more restrictive understandings that members of these communities have simultaneously held. With the institutionalization of the civil sphere in the formally democratic nation states of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these tensions, far from being resolved, only became more pressing and more central to the social systems of which they were an increasingly important part.

Thinking in functional terms about restrictions on the institutionalization of early civil societies, one may say that civil society remained only one sphere among others within a broader social system. English, French, and American societies were, and are, also composed of powerful and decidedly noncivil spheres. The family, religious groups, scientific associations, economic institutions, and geographically bounded regional communities produced different kinds of goods and organized their social relations according to different ideals and constraints. Families, for example, are bound by love and emotional loyalty, not civil respect and critical rationality; they are organized, moreover, in highly authoritarian relations, not only between parents and children but between husband and wife. The same can be said for the market relations that define capitalism, which emphasize efficiency rather than fairness, competition rather than solidarity, and, once again, hierarchical rather than egalitarian forms of respect. Religious organizations are similarly vertical in their organization, despite the significant horizontal relationships engendered in Protestant sects; at least historically, they have been committed to the highly elitist and exclusionary principle that only those born within a faith, and among these only those specifically called to God, were to be fully respected and obeyed. Scientific communities also manifest this exclusionary elitism—around truth rather than salvation—although they are even more associational and collegial internally.

These noncivil spheres did not simply sit outside the boundaries of civil society and conduct with it a courteous and respectful exchange, as the social theory of early liberalism imagined and as contemporary conservatives would so much like to believe today. To the contrary, they invaded civil society from its very inception, interpenetrating with it in systematic and fateful ways. The qualities, relationships, and goods highly valued in these other spheres became translated into restrictive and exclusionary requisites for participation in civil society itself. For example, familial patriarchy expressed itself in the widely held belief that women were not autonomous, rational, or honest enough to participate in the public sphere. The force of capitalist economic institutions encouraged the belief that failure in the market sphere revealed a parallel incompetence in democratic life, hence the long-standing exclusion of the propertyless from full electoral participation and the polluting stereotypes about the irrationality and even animality of the "soot covered classes." It is easy to see the conversion of religious into civil competence in much the same way:

only members in good standing of certified and dominant confessions could possess the conscience, trust, and common sense required for civil society itself.

But the utopian promises of civil society were also fractured for what might be called historical reasons, not only for functional ones, and it is these that will especially concern us here. Civil societies are not some abstract, free-floating space. They exist in real historical time as part of political regimes that are founded by conquest, immigration, and revolution. The founders of societies manifest distinctive primary, or "primordial," characteristics, qualities of race, language, religion, gender, sexuality, and national origins.[3] In the historical construction of civil societies, therefore, one finds that the primordial qualities of these founders are established as the highest criteria of humanity, that they are represented as embodying a higher competence for civil society. Only people of a certain race, who speak a certain language, who practice a certain religion, and who have immigrated from a certain part on the globe—only these very special persons are believed to actually possess what it takes to be members of our ideal civil sphere. Only they can be trusted to exhibit the sacred qualities for participation.

These empirical considerations bring us to the crux of the problem for theorists involved in contemporary multicultural debates. The difficulty for liberal social theory, and for the participants in these "actually existing civil societies," is that these contradictory dimensions of formally democratic social systems did not, and do not, express themselves in a transparent way. To the contrary, these contradictions were hidden by constitutional principles and Enlightenment culture alike. As feminist social theorists were the first to clearly demonstrate, these early modern social systems were divided into public and private spheres. In the former, civil and democratic principles prevailed. In the latter, the private spheres, people were relatively "free" to do what they liked, to whom they liked, and in all sorts of decidedly undemocratic ways. In fact, in the famous essay Kant wrote in 1784, "What Is Enlightenment," he made this distinction the very basis of his defense of autonomous reason itself. In the public sphere, Kant declared, all men are enabled, indeed mandated, to challenge authority in the name of autonomy and to act according to the principles of universalism. Yet when these same men are in their private spheres—in the church, the business organization, the family, the army, or the state—they are not allowed to exercise these civil rights and they do not have to allow others to exercise them in turn. To the contrary, Kant insisted, they must obey noncivil authorities in a highly subservient way.

While this private-public distinction served after a fashion to protect the civil sphere from complete affixiation, it also testified to its profound limitations. For the public world was not nearly so shielded from the vagaries of the private worlds as Enlightenment and constitutional thinking proclaimed. To the contrary, as I have suggested, the functional and historical particularities expressed in private life invaded and distorted the understanding of civil life—culturally, institutionally, psychologically, and in interactional practices of everyday life. Jews may have been allowed to practice their religion in the privacy of their homes—although sometimes they were not—but "Jewishness" carried such a stigma that Jews were also excluded from most of the central institutions of public life. The same contradiction of the purported universality of the public sphere applied to other supposedly private categories, like race, gender and sexuality, ethnicity, class position, religion, and physical location.

---

[3] To avoid any misunderstanding, let me affirm that primordial qualities do not exist in and of themselves. Qualities are constructed as primordial rather than being objectively so. Primordial qualities are those that form the basis for the ethical in Hegel's sense, for communalization in the Weberian. Any human or social quality can be treated in a primordial manner, although certain characteristics have repeatedly received such treatment in the course of history.

VARIETIES OF CIVIL INCORPORATION: INCORPORATION AND RESISTANCE IN CIVIL SOCIETIES

In the 300 years since the first democratic institutionalizations of civil society emerged, the crippling of its utopian promises has generated continuous struggle. These have not only been political struggles for power but legal, cultural, and emotional arguments about definitions of competence and identity, about symbolic representations of the primordial qualities of dominant and excluded groups.

Whether or not members of the core group of society become communicatively convinced—or are regulated to behave as if they are—that subordinate group members actually possess a common humanity, and thus are worthy of respect, is critical to the process that can be called "incorporation."[4] Incorporation points to the possibility of closing the gap between stigmatized categories of persons—persons whose particular identities have been relegated to the invisibility of private life—and the utopian promises that in principle regulate civil life, principles that imply equality, solidarity, and respect among members of society. Whether social movements try to close this gap or exacerbate it, they make their insistent demands vis-à-vis the imminent possibilities of this incorporative process. But incorporation does not only occur in the public arena of social movements; it is a process that proceeds along extraordinarily complex paths, extending from micro interactions, such as intermarriage, to macro arenas like labor markets. Insofar as social systems contain a civil dimension, members of their core groups always face the imminent question of whether in regard to a particular category of excluded persons—whether defined by class, region, gender, race, religion, or national origin—this gap should be closed. Should the incorporation of this particular group into civil society proceed?

As intensive symbolic and material conflicts develop between core and out-group, social movements emerge that issue challenges to the cultural legitimation of exclusion, criticizing stigmatizing interactions and challenging distorted institutions of communication and corrupt institutions of regulation. Such movements demand that out-group identities be reconstructed in terms of the civil discourse of liberty, instead of the anticivil discourse of repression; that interaction between core and out-group members be more respectful; that fictional and factual media representations of out-group activities be more sympathetic and evenhanded; and that regulative institutions be more responsive, inclusive, and attentive. These "demands" of out-group representatives and social movement leaders should be conceived in the first instance not as connected with force but rather as efforts at persuasion; they are, in a sense, "translations" of the discourse of civil society that social movements broadcast via communicative institutions to other, more integrated members. These translations are often punctuated by efforts at gaining more regulative intervention through court rulings, administrative decrees, and electoral change, efforts that depend upon resources of a more coercive nature.

The discursive "stuff" of such struggles over exclusion seems invariably to revolve around two points of contention, issues that obsess out-group challengers and core group members alike.

(1) Is the civil society of a particular nation-state really autonomous? How "free-floating" can it be vis-à-vis the historical primordialities instantiated in various forms of national stratification? Or is the nation's civil realm so closely attached

---

[4] I choose this as a more value-neutral term than, for example, "inclusion," which suggests a more *gemeinschaftlich* kind of participation, a true opening up that involves something like authentic recognition. At the same time, I choose incorporation to describe the accession of out-groups to emphasize a movement "into" society, in the Durkheimian sense of Parsons and Shils, rather than simply the assumption of greater power by a dominated group.

to primordial understandings that it should be regarded not as providing a coun-
terweight to stratification but, instead, simply as a legitimation of it?[5]

The other mode of argumentation that continually surfaces connects to but is from the first.

(2) How should the identities of outsiders be understood in relation to the dualities
of the discourse of civil society? For example, are they rational or irrational,
honest or deceitful, open or secretive, autonomous or dependent?[6]

The democratic, Enlightenment answers to this pair of fundamental and fateful ques-
tions are straightforward. In real civil societies, however, such morally correct answers
have not been fully forthcoming. What is particularly interesting from a sociological point
of view, moreover, is that, even when such democratic answers have been given, they have
been formulated and institutionalized in three very different ideal-typical ways—as assim-
ilation, ethnic hyphenation, and multiculturalism.

Assimilation: Separating Persons from Qualities

Assimilation has been by far the most common way in which the historical expansion and
revision of the civil sphere have taken place. For comparative and empirical reasons,
therefore, as well as for moral ones, it is important to define assimilation very precisely. In
assimilative incorporation, members of primordially denigrated groups are allowed, and
often encouraged, to "pass" into public life. As this notion of passing suggests, such incor-
poration is not merely the result of regulative institutions guaranteeing excluded groups
civil treatment in a procedural sense. The communal life of societies is much too layered
and culturally textured for that. Because civil competences are always interlarded with
particular identities, any mode of incorporation must focus on the public construction of
public identities, on how the civic competences of core groups are related to the abilities of
subordinate ones.

Assimilation is an incorporative process that achieves this extension, or transformation,
in a distinctive way. Assimilation takes place when out-group members are allowed to
enter fully into civil life on the condition that they shed their polluted primordial identities.
Assimilation is possible to the degree that socialization channels exist that can provide
"civilizing" or "purifying" processes—through interaction, education, or mass mediated
representation—that allow *persons* to be separated from their primordial *qualities. It is not
the qualities themselves that are purified or accepted but the persons who formerly, and
often still privately, bear them.* This is the genius of assimilation; it is also, from our
contemporary, postmodern point of view, its limitation in both an empirical and moral
sense.

From the perspective of the formal promises of civil society, and often from the per-
spective of core group members themselves, this assimilating purification process pro-
vides for the members of out-groups a civil education, imparting to them the competences
required for participation in democratic and civil life. As we have seen, however, civil

---

[5] This notion of civil impartiality as merely a legitimation of primordiality is exactly the claim made by the
radical multiculturalists I discussed above.

[6] The discourse about the qualities of outsiders and insiders is, of course, much more symbolically complex, as
I have indicated, for example, in the article that accompanies the present one in this journal. The discourse is
conducted in reference to a culture structure that specifies desirable and undesirable qualities in terms of actors'
motives, their relations, and the kinds of institutions they form. For a combination of systemic, institutional, and
cultural reasons, this overarching cultural framework has changed surprisingly little over centuries of time. Cf.
Alexander and Smith (1993).

competence is, in fact, neither practiced nor understood in such a purely abstract, formally universalistic way. It is always and everywhere filtered through the primordialities of the core group. Insofar as assimilative processes occur, therefore, persons whose identities are polluted in the private sphere actually are learning how to exhibit new and different primordial qualities in the public sphere. What they are learning is not civil competence per se but how to express civil competence in a different kind of primordial way, as Protestants rather than as Catholics or Jews, as Anglos rather than as Mexicans, as whites rather than as blacks, as northwest Europeans rather than as southern or eastern Europeans, as middle class rather than working class persons.

Civic education is not an opening up to the abstract qualities of Enlightenment rationality per se; civic education means, rather, learning how to embody and express those qualities that allow *core group* members persuasively and legitimately to exhibit civil competence. When Eugen Weber (1976) wrote that the French Third Republic turned "peasants into Frenchmen," he was talking about exactly such assimilation. The qualities of peasant life, in and of themselves, remained highly stigmatized by the core groups of France, particularly by Parisian elites. Members of rural France learned how to manifest the qualities of Parisian Frenchness, qualities of lifestyle, bearing, language, religion, and thought, which when properly exhibited gave them a newfound status, a social respect that allowed them to be much more thoroughly incorporated into the civil and democratic life of France.[7]

Assimilation is historically the first and sociologically the most "natural" response to the contradiction between public civility and private particularity that has marked modern mass civil societies from their very beginnings. It is the most "natural" because incorporation can be achieved without appearing to challenge the established primordial definitions of civic competence. *In assimilative incorporation, the* qualities *that define "foreign" and "different" do not change; rather, the* persons *who are members of foreign and different out-groups are, as it were, allowed to shed these qualities in their public lives.* They can change from being "different" and "foreigners" to being "normal" and "one of us."

The plasticity of identity, its cultural and constructed character, allows such assimilative transformation to occur vis-à-vis every conceivable primordial quality. Not only ethnicity and language but the public identities of stigmatized members of religious and even race, gender, and sexual groups can be reconstructed in an assimilative way. The qualities of these groups remain stigmatized, but they can now be left behind at the door of private life; those who carry them privately can venture forth into the public exhibiting civic competence in a very different way. With assimilation—and this is the crucial point—the split between private and public remains in place; indeed, because the polluted qualities of stigmatized group membership are even more firmly restricted to the private sphere, this split becomes sharper and more unyielding. From a moral point of view, assimilative incorporation is paradoxical. On the one hand, it fails entirely to challenge the myth of "transparent" civility, leaving in place the illusion, so cherished by members of already established core groups, that primordial characteristics do not belie the substantive validity

---

[7] To speak of "exhibiting" or "manifesting" civil qualities suggests not only a theoretical emphasis on self and agency but a sense of the complexities of the self, one whose relation to social values must be conceptualized more fully than any simple notion of value internalization and externalization implies. As Erving Goffman (1956) suggested, actors generally try to "present" only those elements of their selves that embody social values; that is, they make publicly available only those parts of their identities that they hope will be regarded by interactional partners or observers as typifying dominant, institutionalized values. This frontstage behavior may be markedly different, of course, from backstage. While Goffman's dramaturgical sociology of public interaction has extraordinary relevance to the interactional dimensions of civil exclusion and incorporation, he himself never historicized this approach. Rather than viewing the normative criteria mediating interactions culturally or comparatively, Goffman tended to describe them as generic to human behavior as such. Neither did he relate his notion of the fragmented self to the notion of the fragmented civil sphere, with its split between public and private.

of the civil sphere. On the other hand, it is precisely this failure to challenge civil transparency that allows out-groups to be massively incorporated in an assimilative way. The paradox is that precisely by failing to challenge negative representations of out-group qualities, by keeping them private and outside of the public sphere, assimilation reproduces demeaning stereotypes in its own way, confirming the substantive restrictions and debilitating contradictions of the promise of civil society.

Hyphenation: Neutralizing Negative Qualities by Symbolic Association with the Core

In its ideal-typical form, assimilation is an unstable social process. In social systems that have weaker and less autonomous civil spheres, this instability can lead not to a widening but to a narrowing, not to the emergence of cross-group identities but to the even further separation of primordial identities. In the name of threatened primordial groups, social movements arise that demand a more restrictive identification of civil competence and even the destruction of civil society itself (e.g., Mosse 1964). In social systems with relatively stronger civil societies, however, the instability of assimilation can push it in a more "ethnic," less dichotomized direction. This positive development involves a double movement. Outsider particularities are viewed in less one-sidedly negative ways. Conceived as "ethnic" rather than "foreign," they are more tolerated in both private and public life. At the same time, the possibility of forming stronger and deeper cross-group bonds that bridge, or transcend, these particularities is viewed more positively as well. In this manner, the emergence of ethnicity can be said to "hyphenate" the primordial identities of the core group, suggesting some fluidity in the interchange of primordial qualities and, at the same time, contributing to the creation of a common collective identity that may be neither core nor peripheral in itself. The more fluid interchange can take place at various levels of civil society. Culturally, hybrid discourses can emerge from the symbolic codes and narratives of primordial groupings that were once entirely separated. At the interactional level, new sites for the public presentation of self can emerge, which provide opportunities for dialogue, understanding, and emotional bonding that lead to increasing rates of friendship and intermarriage between members of core and out-groups.

The notion of ethnic hyphenation, however, does not in any sense suggest the equal valuation of core and outsider qualities; to the contrary, significant stigmatization remains. It suggests, rather, a movement of relative reevaluation that allows more fluidity and transferability between primordial categories that remain more and less polluted representations of civic competence. It is precisely because differential valuation remains that hyphenation, like assimilation, is not only an ambiguous but a highly unstable social form. The dynamics that produce it and that follow in its wake can lead to a more independent civil realm and more recognition for outsider primordial qualities, eventually even to the creation of a much less contradictory, multicultural civil society. These same dynamics, however, also can trigger reactions that close civil society down, sharply narrowing the range of primordial identities that are available for expressing civil competence in a positively evaluated way.

Multiculturalism: Purifying Subaltern Qualities and Pluralizing the Civil Sphere

The moral and sociological "problem" with hyphenation, and even more so with assimilation, is that its ambition does not extend to redefining outsider qualities as much as to allowing members of denigrated groups to be separated from them. For this reason, the anticivil narrowings of national communities can be demystified only by moving beyond

hyphenation to a mode of incorporation that seems different not only in degree but in kind. Only very recently in democratic societies has there emerged such a third, "multicultural" possibility for expanding and revising the civil sphere. The rhetoric generated by this new model of incorporation still focuses on whether or not civil society can be truly universal and separated from the primordial restrictions of particular groups, and this possibility continues to be discussed in terms of "purifying" or reconstructing out-groups in terms of the discourse of liberty rather than repression. *Instead of trying to purify the characters of denigrated persons, however, discursive conflicts that are mediated by the multicultural mode of incorporation revolve around efforts to purify the actual primordial qualities themselves.* It is the *qualities* of being woman, of being nonwhite, of being homosexual or lesbian, of being handicapped that core group and out-group members struggle to understand and experience. Insofar as outsider qualities are seen not as stigmatizing but as variations on civil and utopian themes, they will be valued in themselves. "Difference" and particularity become sources of cross-group identification, and, in this apparently paradoxical manner, increasingly common experiences are created across the particular communities that compose civil society. The great philosopher of hermeneutics, Wilhelm Dilthey, argued that social scientific "understanding" can never surpass the investigator's own experience of his own life. In contrast with assimilation, and even with hyphenation, multiculturalism expands the range of imagined life experiences for the members of a society's core groups. In doing so, it opens up the possibility not just for acceptance but for understanding. Insofar as such understandings are achieved, rigid distinctions between core and out-group members break down, and notions of particularity and universality become much more thoroughly intertwined.

Multiculturalism can be understood as a moral preference. Yet it is also very much an empirical process. While multicultural incorporation remains in its infancy, and is more than ever subject to strenuous debate, the outlines of what it might entail for democratic societies are beginning to become clear. It is set in motion by discursive and organizational conflicts over incorporation, conflicts that participants believe can be resolved only by more successfully legitimating their different qualities. In societies that have experienced intense racial and ethnic conflicts, and have deepened civil society by hyphenating core group identity with primordialities of different kinds, a universalizing movement toward the recognition of particularity begins to appear. In assimilation and hyphenation, the particular is universalized. In multiculturalism, the universal is particularized. In assimilation and hyphenation, the ambition of out-groups is to replace ascriptive identification with status based on achievement. In multiculturalism, the ambition is to achieve—to perform and to display—what once appeared to be an ascriptively rooted, primordial identity. Because particular differences do not have to be eliminated or denied in order for this kind of incorporation to be gained, the sharp split between private and public realms recedes. Noncore primordialities become publicly displayed. They are folded into the culture of authenticity that communitarian philosophers like Charles Taylor (1989) have described as one of the most distinctive achievements of modernity. This is what the "recognition of difference," an important ideological slogan as well as a philosophical idea, means in sociological terms.

In a multicultural community, incorporation is not celebrated as inclusion but as the achievement of diversity. When universal solidarity is deepened in this way, particularity and difference become the guiding themes of the day. Race, peripheral national origins, marginalized religions, subordinated genders and repressed sexualities, even minority languages and peripheral areas of the national territory—all these primordial qualities are open to reinterpretation as representations of the "sacred" qualities of civility. Because there is a dramatic decrease in the negative identification of previously subordinated, or

subaltern, identities aspects of these identities begin to be embraced by core group members themselves.

A wide range of developments over the last two decades of American society can be understood in terms of this multicultural frame. "Black is beautiful" was not a slogan that emerged from the assimilative, race-blind program of the movement for civil rights. It was an idea that arose later, from the struggle to neutralize and invert its negative racial identification. It was expressed strongly and openly, and broadcast widely, because earlier models of incorporation into civil society were already beginning to take effect. Today, blackness is vigorously expressed in the world of fashion, and models of male and female beauty have dramatically crossed once forbidding racial lines. Intermarriage rates have also steeply risen (Farley 1999), indicating that civil interaction has broken down some of the most restrictive barriers of private life. Students of contemporary ethnicity have discovered that ethnicity is increasingly becoming an identity that is selectively pursued. As social observers such as Herbert Gans, Stanley Lieberson, and Mary Waters have shown, Americans display ethnicity "symbolically," because it is considered interesting and attractive rather than because it is treated by selves and others as an unchangeable and essential part of identity. As subordinated racial, gender, and religious ties are transvaluated, they have become fractured and displayed in increasingly hybrid terms. In American universities and critical circles, the centrality of canonical bodies of art is being displaced. As communicative institutions broadcast narratives by "minority" writers that make their own particularities sacred and cast their distinctive particularities as heroic protagonists, increasingly prestigious bodies of women's, black, hispanic, Indian, and homosexual literatures have emerged, and their critical interpreters, themselves typically members of these once denigrated groups, have assumed influential intellectual positions on the American cultural scene.[8] Similarly, whereas the postwar generation of Jewish artists and entertainers, from Saul Bellow to Milton Berle, were intent on translating their particular experiences

---

[8] The extraordinarily public debates about multiculturalism and the literary canon have so politicized this subject that it is almost inevitably employed as an example to cast multiculturalism in a separatist, fragmenting light. The leading critical interpreters of their community's own literature, however, often see their own efforts in a much more universalizing and incorporative light. On the one hand, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., W. E. B. Dubois Professor of the Humanities at Harvard, defends his efforts to reveal black literature's distinctive qualities.

> Long after white American literature has been anthologized and canonized, and recanonized, our efforts to define a black American canon are often decried as racist, separatist, nationalist, or "essentialist." Attempts to derive theories about our literary tradition from the black tradition . . . are often greeted by our colleagues in traditional literature departments as misguided desire to secede from a union that only recently, and with considerable kicking and screaming, has been forged. (1992:197)

Yet Gates also argues that black literature is, in fact, neither particularist nor separated from the wider democratic culture.

> Every black American text must confess to a complex ancestry, one high and low . . . but also one white and black. There can be no doubt that white texts inform and influence black texts (and vice versa), so that a thoroughly integrated canon of American literature is not only politically sound it is intellectually sound as well ... The attempts of black scholars to define a black American canon, and to derive indigenous theories of interpretation from within this canon, are not meant to refute the soundness of these gestures of integration. (ibid.)

A similar perspective is expressed by Enrique Fernandez, the editor of *Mas*, a national Spanish language magazine.

> Multiculturalism has a separatist current (if I'm Latino and you're not, you can't use my secret handshake), and some of it is, alas, necessary for survival—literally, in some streets: culturally, in some salons. It also has an integrationist current. And that means enlarging the barriers erected by chauvinism. In that current, culture is no one's hegemony, not one nationality's, not one class's, not one gender's, not one race's, no one's. It's culture as integration, instead of submission and assimilation. . . . If it's human, it's yours. Take it. Share it. Mix it. Rock it. (1992:197)

into universal, non-Jewish terms, contemporaries like Philip Roth and Woody Allen publicly display their religious identities, adding a new range of particularistic symbol roles for Jews and non-Jews alike.

The manner in which the regulatory institutions of civil society enforce these shifts in public opinion has begun to change in complementary ways. When legal rights are extended for fuller civil participation, procedures are now put into place with the express intention of preserving "authentic" and particular cultural communities. When access to the ballot box is protected, efforts are made to ensure that voting will allow the expression not only of individual rights but collective identities, including not just racial but linguistic minorities (Horowitz 1992:17). When the United States Congress radically opened up immigration flows in the mid-1960s, it discarded the national origins criteria that in the 1920s had been instituted to protect core group primordiality and to keep the assimilation model firmly in place. The millions of immigrants who have legally entered American civil society since then have radically changed the racial complexion of the United States, adding demographic fuel to the struggle to allow incorporation to proceed in a more multicultural way.

CONCLUSION: ANALYTIC CLARITY AND THE MESSINESS OF EMPIRICAL REALITY

Because the "varieties of civil incorporation" I have presented in this essay are ideal types, it is important to recall Max Weber's admonition that the empirical distinctions have been emphasized for analytical reasons. In practice, assimilation, hyphenation, and multiculturalism blend into one another, and in real historical time particular communities participate in all three of these processes at the same time. Members of the American black community continue to strive for assimilation and to be regarded in thoroughly nonracial ways, even as they become "African-Americans" developing hyphenated identities and, as members of a "community of color," strive to maintain and restore the distinctively different aspects of their racial culture and demand that it be recognized in a multicultural way. Economic divisions, territorial separations, and other disparities of place, time, and institutional position also complicate the different dimensions along which incorporation proceeds within any particular community.

I began this article by demonstrating how multiculturalism is often fundamentally misunderstood. Not only social conservatives but radical multicultural intellectuals describe it as a process that is organized around separation and difference rather than inclusion and solidarity. By placing this new and challenging model of interrelation into the broader framework of civil society, and by connecting it with other modes of incorporation, I have tried to suggest, to the contrary, that multiculturalism sits between difference and solidarity as these terms are commonly understood. Multiculturalism frames a situation in which groups publicly assert the right to be admired for being different. Multiculturalism thus represents not the diminution but the strengthening of the civil sphere, a sphere that in cultural, institutional, and interactive ways has carved out a domain in which collective obligations and individual autonomy are precariously but fundamentally intertwined. Multiculturalism is a project that can be attempted only in a situation of increasing, not diminishing, feelings of common humanity. Only when solidary feelings have been extended significantly to persons can they finally begin to be extended to their qualities.

REFERENCES

Adler, Peter S. 1974. "Beyond Cultural Identity: Reflections on Cultural and Multicultural Man." Pp. 262–380 in *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*, edited by Larry A. Amaovar and Richard E. Porter. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

————. 1998. "Civil Society I, II, II: Constructing an Empirical Concept from Normative Controversies and Historical Transformations." Pp. 1–20 in *Real Civil Societies*, edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander. London: Sage.

Alexander, Jeffrey C., and Philip Smith. 1993. "The Discourse of American Civil Society: A New Proposal for Cultural Studies." *Theory and Society* 22:151–207.

Farley, Reynolds. 1999. "Racial Issues: Recent Trends in Residential Patterns." Pp. 85–128 in *Diversity and Its Discontents*, edited by Neil J. Smelser and Jeffrey C. Alexander. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Fernandez, Enrique. 1992. "P.C. Rider." Pp. 322–25 in *Debating P.C.: The Controversy over Political Correctness on College Campuses*, edited by Paul A. Berman. New York: Dell.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. 1992. "Whose Canon Is It, Anyway?" Pp. 190–200 in *Debating P.C.: The Controversy over Political Correctness on College Campuses*, edited by Paul A. Berman. New York: Dell.

Goffman, Erving. 1956. *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor.

Horowitz, Donald L. 1992. "Immigration and Group Relations in France and America." Pp. 3–35 in *Immigrants in Two Democracies: French and American Experience*, edited by David L. Horowitz and Gerard Noiriel. New York: New York University Press.

Kimball, Roger. 1992. "The Periphery v. the Center: The MLA in Chicago." Pp. 61–84 in *Debating P.C.: The Controversy over Political Correctness on College Campuses*, edited by Paul A. Berman. New York: Dell.

Mosse, George. 1964. *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*. New York: Grossett and Dunlap.

Schlesinger, Arthur, Jr. 1991. *The Disuniting of America*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Stimpson, Catherine R. 1992. "On Differences: Modern Language Association Presidential Address 1990." Pp. 40–60 in *Debating P.C.: The Controversy over Political Correctness on College Campuses*, edited by Paul A. Berman. New York: Dell.

Taylor, Charles. 1989. *Sources of the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Weber, Eugen. 1976. *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Young, Iris Marion. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.