'Cultural' versus 'Culture':

Locating Intersectional Identities and Power

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In Canadian political thought, Will Kymlicka's theory of multicultural citizenship (1995) and Charles Taylor's theory of recognition (1992) have been pivotal in constituting liberal multiculturalism as the prevailing site for theorizing the diversity of cultures. Liberal multiculturalism has firmly situated 'culture' in the context of relations between dominant groups and minority cultures. The effect of this has been significant in locating the discourse of identity/difference in mainstream political theory. Yet, I shall argue, 'culture' has been conceptually limited to ethnicity, nationhood, and linguistic difference without addressing other modes of difference or intersections of difference. Such a conception of 'culture' has contributed to constructing and reinstituting cultures as essential objects that are Othered. To develop an alternative to dominant liberal multicultural interpretations of 'culture', as an initial step, it is helpful to turn to critical anthropology and cultural studies because these disciplines emphasize cultural activity rather than culture-as-object.[1] Drawing from these disciplines and through the *Aboriginal Women's Roundtable Report on Gender Equality* (2000), I explore the implications of making an analytical shift from 'culture' as bounded object to analyzing the 'cultural' as contested process, and the extent to which this shift creates opportunities to address intersectional identities and arrangements of power in ways that liberal multiculturalists fail to do. 'Cultural', I argue, moves analysis beyond Othered cultures to locating the production of cultural identities and cultural relations in contexts of power. In the final section I offer some tools for theorizing identity/difference that arise from the conceptual shift to 'cultural'.

'Culture' in Liberal Multicultural Thought

In *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995), Kymlicka presents a theory of minority rights in order to enhance liberal individual freedom and equality, and also to define the limits of minority rights in the context of relations with the liberal state. In Taylor's, 'The Politics of Recognition' (1992), he offers a theory of recognition as a sophisticated appeal for the

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[1] Underlying this premise is that although culture can and should be re-theorized within political theory, political theorists must find ways of analysing culture without simply inserting alternate visions from other disciplines or without entirely rejecting political theory. The meaning and use of culture cannot be merely transported from other disciplines as the aims of political theory are not identical to those in anthropology or cultural studies. The insights of other disciplines, however, are useful in challenging the constricted notion of culture that is assumed within liberal multicultural thought.

acknowledgment of difference, in which the survival of minority cultures enables us to be authentic, foster equal dignity, and prevent social fragmentation. Whilst Kymlicka appeals to liberal individualists to respond to concerns of culture, Taylor employs liberal-communitarianism to situate the importance of culture. Although they come from different traditions of liberalism and indeed present distinct visions of diversity, both have advanced the discourse of liberal multiculturalism as the dominant site for theorizing identity/difference within political theory. It is the common and salient features of their approaches to 'culture' that I focus on in this section.

Culture-as-ethnic/nation/linguistic-Other

Kymlicka and Taylor employ culture as a code for speaking of ethnic groups, historical nations and linguistic minorities, all of which tend to be conflated. For Kymlicka culture is a primary good, a resource that provides a context of choice. He states that culture "refers to the distinct customs, perspectives , or ethos of a group of association" (1995: 18), but then stipulates that he will use 'culture' to refer to national and ethnic differences in which culture is synonymous with a nation or a people (1995: 18). He advocates a notion of societal culture "which provides its members with meaningful ways of life across a full range of human activities… encompassing both public and private spheres" (1995: 76). He, however, limits culture to groups that are territorially concentrated and share a common language (i.e. Aboriginals and French-Canadians living in Quebec), and polyethnic minorities whose members are assumed to share language, history and a broad belief system.

For Taylor, culture exists prior to primary goods, in which cultural survival is a vital human need (1994b: 26). Taylor argues that through other-understanding it is possible to gain awareness of what is valuable to each other's culture, as well as a critical perspective of our own culture. He contends that it is not possible to fully know others, but that through dialogue and exchange it becomes possible to respect other cultures. Although Taylor does stipulate a definition of 'culture', like Kymlicka he also focuses on the Quebec and Aboriginal people as ethnic minorities and nations (1992: 52-55).[2] The conflation of

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[2] The threat to the liberal state of Canada was concrete at the time both Kymlicka and Taylor wrote. Kymlicka's *Multicultural Citizenship* was published in 1995 and Taylor published collected essays on Canadian unity (*Reconciling the Solitudes*) in 1993. Both were preoccupied by issues of self-determination

ethnicity, nation and linguistic difference is particularly evident in their discussions of Quebec, in which the distinctions between descendents of the original French settlers and other Franco phones which includes Haitians and West Africans (who reside within and outside of Quebec) are blurred despite differences in national origins and ethnicity.

Centrally, culture-as-ethnic/national/linguistic-group is used by Kymlicka and Taylor to construct categories of difference. Feminist and post-colonial critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak contests that 'culture' in multicultural discourses is "a nice name for the exoticism of the outsiders" (1999: 355). The unspoken premise of both thinkers employs this notion of the outsider so that culture is used only in reference to Others. Anthropologist David Scott argues that 'culture' is the most recent way of conceiving and constructing Otherness (2003: 103-4). The Renaissance era constructed the non-European Other through Christianity; in the Enlightenment the Other was interpreted through distinctions between European Reason and non-European Ignorance; through the nineteenth century, race organized the paradigms of normalcy and Otherness. In the twentieth century, Scott states, culture "becomes the grid and horizon of difference. It becomes, so to speak, the commanding natural language of difference" (2003: 104).

The ideological replacement of differentiating Others through 'culture' takes place without addressing dominant cultural identities. Cultures that are normalized (i.e. dominant cultures) form the background of both Kymlicka's and Taylor's theories but receive little analytical attention. In this, the British (re: Kymlicka) and Canada's culture as North American, modern and Christian (re: Taylor) become homogenized and inserted as a stable norm. Kymlicka oversimplifies the dominant culture as British, when infact dominance has emerged through those who conform to Euro-liberal whiteness. The racialized and western ethno-cultural dominance of some groups has expanded to include immigrant groups who imitate the British (and in many ways also the French). This includes the Scots, Irish, Americans, Germans, Scandinavians, Belgians, Mennonites and Icelandic people. The history of immigration in Canada illustrates that nation-building favoured those ethno-cultural groups both in terms of skin colour and how closely they could assimilate Euro-liberal values. These groups have adapted and been reproduced through processes of Euro-

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for Quebec and the implications of this for Canadian unity in light of the demands made by the Quebecois before and after the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and by the Quebec Referendum.

Canadianisation. As such, the British created an 'imagined community' which hinged on the notion of a white man's country (Dua, 2000: 57)

Taylor argues that although we have to be wary of imposing a homogenizing standard based on North Atlantic civilizations, there are still some cultures that are more advanced than others. The presumption of worth may imagine "a universe in which different cultures complement each other with quite different kinds of contribution" but there are nonetheless some cultures that have a "superiority-in-a-certain-respect" (1994a: 71). Although Taylor is speaking to cultures that have been historically oppressive, such as Nazism, non-white feminist Himani Bannerji argues that he also seems to imply that western Christian cultures are in some ways superior to 'traditional' cultures because of an inherent preference for the kind of liberal rights that he deems necessary for recognition (2000: 136-40). Whilst Taylor argues that non-western and non-Christian cultures should be recognized, he also seems to suggest that the worth of those cultures depends on how they embrace particular western and liberal ways of being.

Furthermore, in employing culture to represent ethnicity, nation, and linguistic difference, Kymlicka and Taylor tend to exclude gender, disability, class and sexual orientation in the constitution of culture. Cultures are seen as whole groups that are self-contained, fixed, bounded, and coherent even though internally ethno-cultural, national and linguistic identities are varied and in a constant state of flux. By defining cultures as ethnic/national/linguistic bounded groups, Kymlicka and Taylor are able to pinpoint a culture which in turn allows them evaluate the value of that group. Cultures become identifiable not through a careful and situated analysis of practices, histories, and relations but through homogenizing assumptions about the nature of a culture. Kymlicka and Taylor are right not to treat cultures as amorphous; however, they underestimate the ways in which members of a culture are constituted through intersectional differences that go beyond culture-as-ethnic/nation/linguistic-Otherness.

Essentializing cultures

The use of culture-as-ethnic/nation/linguistic-Other inevitably leads liberal multiculturalists to present culture through an essentialistic definition, in which it becomes an object. An essentialistic definition of culture focuses on the question 'what is

a culture?' by describing its nature. Essentialistic views of culture risk "reifying cultures as separate entities by over-emphasising their boundedness and mutual distinctness; it risks overemphasizing the internal homogeneity of culture in terms that potentially legitimize repressive demands for communal conformity" (Turner, 1994: 407). This use of 'culture' treats cultural groups as if they were bounded entities defined through fixed criteria in which members of a culture are homogeneous. This specifically becomes translated into an understanding of culture-as-community.[3]

Kymlicka essentializes national minority and polyethnic cultures so that the differences within Aboriginal nations (including those living off as well as on reserves) and French-Canadian groups (including those living within and outside Quebec, and those of European descent and non-European descent) and polyethnic minorities are ignored. Further, Kymlicka assumes that societal cultures are stable, unchanging and unified, when infact cultures vary enormously and are not necessarily cohesive. It is also the case that not all of the people that belong to a particular ethno-cultural minority group will have the same cultural options or possibilities (Carens, 2000: 70). Even the importance of language to members of a group will vary and be situational. Kymlicka presupposes that people belong to only one societal culture, when indeed people may move in and out of societal cultures or belong to many societal cultures simultaneously or change societal cultures at some point in their life or only partially participate in cultural practices. Certainly Kymlicka acknowledges that the character of cultural groups changes as a result of the choices of its members (1995: 104-5), but he continues to treat the boundaries of culture as if they were fixed.

Taylor makes the claim that it is possible to make judgements about the worth of a culture through immersion. This is only possible if a culture is assumed to be unified and homogeneous in such a way as to make judgments about it as a whole entity. Whilst it is possible to make judgments about certain practices that are just, unjust, hierarchical, egalitarian, solidaristic or individualistic, it is problematic to make judgments about the totality of a culture (Benhabib, 2002: 58). But Taylor essentializes culture and as such reduces cultures "within a colonial discourse of tradition and modernity, [thus] spatializing

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[3] Mark Reinhardt provides an insightful critique of the ways in which "the most generous of communitarian thinking ends up defeating its best intentions; in these cases, a simplistic and reductive account of cultural politics obscures the harms done and constraints imposed in the name of building "community," thereby eliding possibilities for more emancipatory practices" (2000). Although Reinhardt directs his criticism to communitarians, I apply the same broad critique against both Kymlicka and Taylor.

these characteristics with a 'West and the rest' approach" (Bannerji, 2000: 144). Taylor argues that although we have to be wary of imposing a homogenizing standard based on North Atlantic civilizations, there are still some cultures that are more advanced than others. The presumption of worth may imagine "a universe in which different cultures complement each other with quite different kinds of contribution" but there are nonetheless some cultures that have a "superiority-in-a-certain-respect" (1994a: 71). Although Taylor is speaking to cultures that have been historically oppressive, such as Nazism, non-white feminist Himani Bannerji argues that he also seems to imply that western Christian cultures are in some ways superior to 'traditional' cultures because of an inherent preference for the kind of liberal rights that he deems necessary for recognition (Bannerji, 2000: 136-140). Whilst Taylor argues that non-western and non-Christian cultures should be recognized, he also seems to suggest that the worth of those cultures depends on how they embrace particular (western and liberal) ways of being.

Furthermore, Taylor suggests that cultures are defined "over a long period of time" and amongst "large numbers of human beings" (1994a: 66-7). In this use, cultures need to be stable, time-endured, mature, and encompassing of many people in order for them to be worthy of cultural recognition. Thus he immediately excludes many cultures in his theory, cultures which may be shifting, transforming, 'in-between', partial[4], or only more recently organized. Taylor qualifies his focus on complete cultures by his dismissal of "partial cultural milieux within a society as well as short phases of major culture" (1994a: 66). This, however results in an over-simplification of culture which has enormous implications particularly for queer and disabled communities who do not have the historically documented longevity of other cultural groups (as a result of the historical forces of power), but who have more recently made claims for recognition. These cultural groups would be largely discounted from Taylor's theory on the ground that they have "not animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time" (1994a: 66).

'Culture' certainly enables short-hand for designating that which many, irrespective of class, gender, sexual orientation, disability/ability, regularly feel, think, and do by virtue of

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[4] I use the terms in-between and partial cultures in Homi Bhabha's sense (1998). He uses these terms to refer to culture not through polarizations of belonging and not belonging, alikeness and divergence but rather as hybridization. Such cultures occupy ambivalent spaces and are contingent, and as such, stand in contrast to the way in which liberals like Taylor and Kymlicka over-simplistically conceptualise culture in distinct simple categories.

having been in continuous contact with others who share some aspect of identity. However, whilst such shorthand is commonplace for communicative convenience, it is used to represent some sort of mega-culture without any qualification or interrogation of its usage and without reference to overlapping and multiple aspects of identity. The problematic understandings of 'culture' are not, in my mind, outweighed by its usefulness as a simple and trans-disciplinary way to talk about grouped ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Ultimately, shorthand terminology presents culture as an essentialist entity that is spatially and temporally coherent and predetermined.

Turning Outside of Political Theory

The scope of political theory to interrogate 'culture' has been overshadowed by the dominance of liberal multicultural interpretations. It is thus necessary to turn to disciplines outside of political science that have historically and normatively situated culture theory as central. Critical political theorists such as Seyla Benhabib (2002) and James Tully (1995) have already begun to look to other disciplines. They have been attracted to the historical and normative contributions of anthropology that have de-centered Euro-centrism, situated cultural relativism, and rejected essentialist and conflated identifications of culture and race. Benhabib employs the notion of culture-as-narrative in which the standpoint of the participant, rather than the observer, is emphasized (2002: 5-6). Tully treats culture as an activity in contested terrains, in which "cultures are not internally homogeneous. They are continuously contested, imagined and reimagined, transformed and negotiated both by their members and through interaction with each other" (1995: 11). Whilst, both Benhabib and Tully revise the culture-concept by drawing upon anthropology, I explore ways to take this one step further by displacing (but not eliminating) 'culture' and supplanting 'cultural'.

To develop the concept of 'cultural', I turn to semiotics as it has been used by thinkers from anthropology and cultural studies. Semiotics emphasizes the cultural processes of signification (or meaning-making) rather than a culture itself. Semiotics is a mode of knowledge, a way of understanding our world as systems of relations. Central to semiotics is the sign or symbol whose nature is representation; it is something that stands for something else (Gottdiener, 1995: 4). The symbol is "any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception – the conception being the symbol's 'meaning'" (Geertz,

1973: 91). Anything can be a sign when it is interpreted to have a signifying meaning. Semiotics is concerned with knowledge that arises from our understanding of the world through the organized system of signs within the social context. Systems of signification are multi-layered but are always grounded in everyday life experiences and practices. This mode of analysis is indebted to anthropological giants such as Clifford Geertz who offered both a new conceptual meaning of culture to anthropology and situated 'culture' as a central feature of human thought and behavior (1973). Geertz provided a radical account of the importance of symbols, in which the creation, use and consequence of particular symbols are all part of social processes. Since the meaning and force of a symbol varies and is changeable, it is possible to create meanings of justice by shifting symbolic meanings. In this lies the value of semiotics for theories of identity/difference.

The semiotic focus on cultural processes of signification is not unlike Lisa Wedeen's appropriation of anthropological culture-discourse, in which 'culture' is understood as a semiotic practice (2002). As a political scientist, Wedeen draws upon Geertz's use of semiotics with a critical eye on the Geertzian emphasis on culture as a contained system of deeply held beliefs/symbols (2002: 716). She argues that it is necessary to move away from thinking about what a group has (a symbolic system) and what a group is (e.g. an Aboriginal culture). This is because political scientists have over-relied on Geertz's definition of a 'system of symbols' when using 'culture' - which insists upon a coherent, reified and frozen system of meanings – without further investigation of anthropological understandings of the culture-concept (2002: 715-6). For Wedeen, culture "designates a way of looking at the world that requires an account of how symbols operate in practice, why meanings generate action, and why actions produce meaning, when they do" (2002: 720). Culture-as-semiotic-practice does not treat culture as if it was a seamlessly constituted system of integrated meanings; rather, Wedeen's understanding of the culture-concept locates the historical conditions and relevant power relationships that give rise to particular experiences and social locations (2002: 715).

However, while Wedeen is willing to maintain the concept of culture and revise it in a stipulated anthropological way, even as a semiotic practice 'culture' could continue to over-emphasize ethnic groups, nations, and linguistic minorities but with a focus on their practices rather than the usual focus on composition. 'Cultural' provides the necessary linguistic

adjective to describe the processes of meaning-making that 'culture' does not. As anthropologist Arjun Appadurai states that "if *culture* as a noun seems to carry associations with some sort of substance in ways that appear to conceal more than they reveal, *cultural* the adjective moves one into a realm of differences, contrasts and comparisons that is more helpful" (1996: 12).

Further, although Wedeen locates signification processes in contexts of power that are interpreted through structure and agency, she does not explicitly locate postmodernist concerns to decentre and destabilize unitary meanings or objectivist views of knowledge that is indebted to Foucauldian genealogy and Derridean hermeneutics. Whereas Wedeen's use of semiotics suggests that the remedy to injustice lies in reversing systems of signification so that the signified thing is valued and respected, for postmodernists it is important to also deconstruct signification in the context of relations of power so that multiple contested meanings emerge. The integration of semiotics and deconstruction enables a more multifaceted approach than Geertz and Wedeen. I will term the combination of these approaches critical semiotics. Through critical semiotics it becomes possible to examine how meaning-construction is contested, fragile, ambiguous, and infused with complicated relations of power.

Cultural studies thinkers illustrate that an analysis of power locates both the complex terrain of cultural processes of signification and the resultant effects of meanings produced. Cultural studies indeed may be more directly useful for political theorists than anthropology because of shared interests in questions of identity and difference in the current neo-colonial and imperial era.[5] Specifically the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham, under the direction of Stuart Hall, politicizes cultural signification in ways anthropologists have not. In particular, the CCCS examines the process or activity of signifying meaning-construction within the context of economy and politics.[6] As such, meaning-making or systems of significations are anchored in everyday experiences, historically constituted practices, and institutional power. In this we are all subjects of sign systems and not just instrumental agents. Not only do we all speak in and through systems of signs but semiotic processes also shape us (Hall, 1977: 328). Moreover, Hall and other

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[5] This is not to underestimate the way in which cultural studies has been influenced by anthropology.
[6] See, for example, Stuart Hall's 'Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms' (1980) or journals such as *Media, Culture and Society*, *Screen*, *New Formations*, *Social Text*, or *Cultural Studies*

cultural studies thinkers move an understanding of 'cultural' beyond ethnicity and geography - which has tended to be the focus of anthropologists, for historical and disciplinary reasons - to include disability, sexual orientation, class and gender. Critical thinkers from both anthropology and cultural studies ultimately focus on the cultural processes of meaning-making rather than on the notion of culture as the embodiment of signs.[7]

Shifting from 'Culture' and 'Cultural'

Liberal multiculturalists tend to conflate the concepts of culture and cultural, but the distinction presents opportunities for closer analysis of identity/difference in the same way that shifts from 'society' to 'the social' and 'politics' to 'the political' have created new directions of analysis.[8] Whereas 'culture' has become tainted by essentialism, 'cultural' focuses on socially transmitted knowledge and behavior which is not homogeneously taken to have the same meaning for all people. Analysis of a culture demands internal coherence within a group, whilst the concept of cultural does not. In centering on cultures, the role of history, social agents, and representation in the construction of cultural practices, beliefs and values (i.e. signs) becomes obscured. By focusing on cultural meaning-making as a process of significations, rather than examining what or who is included in culture, it becomes possible to shift away from essentializing culture and providing circular justifications as to why culture is valuable. Although the term culture can be used to define an integrated system of signs, the cultural attends to the processes, dynamic activity and emergence of signs in contexts of power.

Analysis of 'cultural' adopts the social constructivist position that meanings or signs (these terms are used interchangeably) are not natural but that they are made. The aim here is not to empty meanings but rather to situate them in contexts of power. Cultural meanings arise from interpretation through systems of meaning-making or systems of signification (these terms are used interchangeably), and as such there is a hermeneutical dimension to semiotics. Through semiotics, the interpreted meaning, however, does not necessarily arise from the self and can indeed be unintended. Two dimensions of analysis emerge through a

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[7] It would be clarifying and productive for anthropologists and cultural studies thinkers) to also move away from using the term 'culture' because the concept 'cultural' better describes their own concerns to explore the processes of cultural production that break from a view of culture-as-object.

[8] These shifts are indebted to the work of Hannah Arendt (1959) and Sheldon Wolin (1960) respectively.

semiotic lens: the particular meanings (e.g. meanings of the term 'gay') and how the meanings become constituted through the systems of meaning-making (e.g. queer, heterosexuality and homosexuality). This encompasses situated or micro-analysis of a meaning, and simultaneously analysis of the macro-level structures and processes. Both are constituted historically through relations of power in which meanings and the systems of meaning-making are contested, often contradictory, conflictual, and always evolving.

Cultural processes of signification reveal that many agents produce and reproduce meanings through various systems. Agents, as individuals and collectivities, are signs within systems of signification. The responsibility for challenging, altering, reversing, re-building, deconstructing, and re-articulating meanings lies not only with those who are affected by meanings but also lies with those who externally shape meanings. For example, to shift the meaning of 'deafness' as a medically inferior disability to a socially constructed linguistic minority is the responsibility of non-Deaf as well as Deaf people (Lane, 1997: 153-171). This means that a whole host of meaning-makers must be accountable for making meanings attached to Others.

Conceptualizing the 'cultural' from a critical semiotics lens illustrates that assertions that seem apparent, natural, universal, sometimes permanent and unquestionable are generated through systems of signification. Cultural practices, beliefs, values are located and meanings represent a position in which power is operational. Although all meanings can be contested, plural and deconstructed, analysis of cultural politics draws attention to the emergence of meanings and how they gain legitimacy over others, why, and by whom.

The concept of 'cultural' further brings to light that cultural systems of signification are multiple, overlapping, and contextually related. As such, it is important to move away from culture-as-ethnic/national/linguistic-Other which is the focus of liberal multicultural thought. This is not to say that ethnicity, nationhood and language are not cultural, but rather it is to acknowledge that analysis of identity/difference needs to go beyond the sub-textual insistence that all are born with and into culture.. This is necessary because claims for cultural status become the ownership of minorities who are essentialized and assumed not to be shaped by other systems of signification, such as gender, sexual orientation, class and disability/able-bodiedness. 'Cultural' is centrally important in theorizing identity/difference because it highlights the processes of identification. Cultural struggles over meaning both

produce and reflect identities, and as such identities generate and act as a vehicle for cultural meaning-making. Specifically, intersecting systems of meaning-making produce cultural epistemology and behavior and at the same are produced through modes of knowledge and activity. Thus 'cultural' provides an analysis of semiotics practices and their outcomes in contexts of power that the liberal multicultural interpretation of 'culture' does not.

Through employment of the critical semiotics approach to cultural meaning-making, I now explore the limits of 'culture' and the insights of 'cultural' using a case study of a roundtable organized by the Canadian state. The Roundtable was designed to consult with Aboriginal women on the question of equality and inclusion which is central to liberal multicultural versions of identity/difference politics.

The Aboriginal Women's Roundtable on Gender Equality

In December 1999, on behalf of the federal government and as a follow-up to the global commitment to gender equality - as stated in *The Federal Plan for Gender Equality*, which served as the primary Canadian government gender equality document at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in 1995 - Status of Women Canada (SWC) undertook a national consultation on gender equality with Canadian women from across the country. At that time, Aboriginal women requested a meeting dedicated specifically to their needs and aspirations. In an effort to address these concerns in the spirit of a commitment to Canadian liberal diversity (or liberal multiculturalism), SWC convened the Aboriginal Women's Roundtable on Gender Equality (henceforth the Roundtable) in Ottawa on March 30-April 1, 2000.[9] The purpose of the Roundtable was to develop a vision statement on Aboriginal women's perspectives on equality and inclusion (2000: 1).

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[9] More than 35 First Nations, Métis and Inuit women from a wide range of regions, organizations and life experiences participated in the Roundtable. Also present were observers from a number of federal government departments, including Status of Women Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Justice Canada, Canadian Heritage, Health Canada, the Privy Council Office and Human Resources Development Canada. The report incorporated the comments made by participants on a draft of the proceedings.

Resisting Essentialism

The Roundtable was premised on a broad liberal feminist paradigm of rights, equality and inclusion that is largely shared by liberal multiculturalists.[10] At the same, the Roundtable was distinctly Canadian in that it juxtaposed liberal feminism (equality as sameness through the agenda of gender equality) and liberal multiculturalism (equality with the acknowledgement of some differences through the actual meeting itself in which Aboriginal women were recognized as having different concerns from other women). The report presents a critique by Aboriginal women of both liberal feminist notions of gender equality and liberal multicultural uses of 'culture'. In this, Aboriginal women resisted essentialist notions of their identities on both gender and culture-as-ethnic/nation-difference grounds. In terms of gender essentialism, Aboriginal women wanted not only to separate and distinguish their concerns from non-Aboriginal women by demanding an alternate venue for consultation, but they also contested the very notions of equality and inclusion that assumed that a universal women's agenda existed, including an Aboriginal women's agenda.

In terms of 'culture', Aboriginal women resisted essentialist understandings that underpin liberal multiculturalism. Specifically, the participants of the Roundtable were invited by the state on assumptions that they were authentic representatives of Aboriginal women, and that they would provide the same kinds of meaning to gender equality. With the emphasis on culture-as-ethnic/nation/linguistic-Other, the differences between Aboriginal women were erased. For example, although participants welcomed the important role of Aboriginal Elders "a number of them questioned honoring only selected traditions and values, since Elders from other communities were not present" (2000: 2). The organizers assumed that the presence of some Elders would satisfy all Aboriginals because of essentialist assumptions about 'the Aboriginal culture'.

In the context of the Roundtable, 'culture' came to represent naturally-given entities that were reified and ahistorical. Postcolonial feminist thinker Uma Narayan calls this pseudoparticularism, which describes "hegemonic representations of 'particular cultures' whose 'particularism' masks the reality that they are problematic generalizations about complex and internally differentiated contexts" (2000: 98). In this interpretation of 'culture',

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[10] Whilst both Taylor and Kymlicka share a commitment to inclusion, Taylor is distinct from Kymlicka in that individual equality is not the primary focus.

differences between Aboriginal nations and peoples are homogenized because time and space is assumed to stabilize and reinforce similarities. Aboriginal cultures are depicted as spatially and normatively cohesive, when in fact, as the participants of the report state, Aboriginal people and cultural signs are plural and divergent. Narayan states, "[s]eemingly universal essentialist generalizations about "all women" are replaced by culture-specific essentialist generalizations that depend on totalizing categories such as "Western culture," "Non-western cultures," "Western women," "Third World women," and so forth" (2000: 81).

Participants indicated that their collective identity as Aboriginal women need not be employed through external and homogenizing assumptions. Their collective identity certainly represented material and symbolic conditions that arose through interconnections between their contexts, epistemology and behavior i.e. through signs and processes of signification. So, for example, participants stated that they were tied together because "they all shared a common commitment to the struggle for healing and justice in the face of more than 500 years of oppression, domination and colonialism" (2000: 15). In this sense, the collective identity of Aboriginal women was not employed as a strategically essentialized identity (although it can and has been employed for strategic reasons), but rather through oppositional consciousness against colonial and imperial processes, as well as the state.[11] At the same time, participants expressed that the different identities amongst them were substantially diverse. Inuit participants "stated that their history, identity and living conditions are distinct from those of other Aboriginal peoples, and as such they cannot accept the federal position that they are a 'supplementary Aboriginal race'" (2000: 4). One Inuit woman suggested that by homogenizing Aboriginal women (and Aboriginal people more generally) the government could avoid treating Inuit treaty rights distinctly from First Nations and Métis rights (2000: 5).[12] The meaning of 'Aboriginal', in other words, needed to be contextualized and politicized so that historical linguistic systems, systems of nation and tribal organization, and other systems of signification informed the variations of 'Aboriginal'. As the report states, participants demanded that "governments recognize that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit each

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[11] I use 'oppositional consciousness' in the same way that Chela Sandoval does, which is somewhat overly dependent on sharing politically effective means for changing the dominant order of power(Sandoval, 1991). Oppositional consciousness arises, in my mind, on a sharing of meanings (whether externally imposed or internally subscribed) rather than

[12] The judicial limbo of Inuit identities and rights has been a historical feature of colonial relations, specifically since the *Indian Act* split Aboriginals peoples by placing some of them outside of the law (Boyko, 1995: 180).

have their own histories and identities, and as such cannot be treated in consultation exercises as though they all formed part of a single convenient group" (2000: 13). This was necessary because processes of essentialism oversimplified and erased the different identities of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women.

Moreover, essentialized meanings created tensions between participants because they felt politically it would serve them to be constructed as coherent and unified, and yet there were inequities between them (e.g. unequal recognition by the state, financial aid, and resources) that they felt pressure to mask. The cost of suppressing intra-Aboriginal tensions has led to the neglect of serious material problems within Aboriginal communities, in which some bands and nations face greater financial hardship than others. Essentialist meanings thus not only have symbolic or racial implications, but also material consequences. Only by shifting from essentialist notions of culture, which naturalize and reify groups of people, does it become possible to alter authoritative meanings that suppress and negate the different experiences of Inuit, Métis and First Nations women.

Locating Power in Multiple Systems of Meaning-Making

Power remains under-theorized in liberal multiculturalists' uses of 'culture', specifically because power is assumed to be one-directional and uni-dimensional. Consequently, the multiple modes of power active in making and marking identities become neglected or obscured. Specifically, liberal multiculturalists fail to analyze racist systems of meaning-making in conjunction with patriarchal and sexist systems of meaning-making because of the over-emphasis on culture-as-ethnic/national/linguistic-Other and the homogenization of minority cultures.[13] As a result, they are confined to offering some limited strategies of inclusion whilst overlooking resistance strategies such as opposition to disciplinary power from within hierarchies (such as capturing positions of authority), manipulating and self-defining ideology so as to destabilize hegemony, and raising

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[13] The replacement of 'race' with 'culture' is an important shift in theories of identity/difference. Although liberal multiculturalists locate their analysis in the context of historical injustices to Aboriginals, Quebec and recent immigrants, the concept of culture has tended to be stripped of its racial politics and history. The same Othered identities that were studied under the rubric of race are now being analyzed but culture describes difference without critically locating racism or processes of racialization. Anthropologist Gillian Cowlishaw argues that though direct references to race have been dropped, the concept of discrete *a priori* categories of human beings has remained central in the social sciences (1987: 223).

consciousness in anti-subordinating ways so as to articulate the standpoint of subject positions (Collins, 2000: 267-288).

Analysis of 'cultural' conversely attends to struggles over meaning by locating relations of power. The processes of meaning-making inform and delineate identities through power. Power is at the centre of cultural struggles in processes of meaning-making because "all signifying practices – that is, all practices that have meaning – involve relations of power" (Jordon & Weedon, 1995: 11). Power, in other words, defines what a meaning represents. Meanings that are defined as authoritative are significant because they shape material and non-material experiences, structures and identities. In particular, by going beyond the study of ethnicity, nationality and linguistic difference it becomes possible to examine how cultural practices, expressions and representations of meaning-making constitute subject positions and particular modes of inter-subjectivity through multiple relations of power. The discourse of liberal multiculturalism, however, does not adequately depict multiple forms of power.

Patricia Hill Collins offers a typology which more explicitly addresses four interrelated domains of power: structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal power (2000: 276). The structural domain of power organizes oppression through institutions and practices; the disciplinary power manages the oppression through surveillance and hierarchies. Hegemonic power justifies oppression, and interpersonal power shapes everyday lived experiences and individual consciousness. The Roundtable report provides evidence that Collins analysis is salient, since all four forms of power were of concern to participants. The participants articulated concerns about the relationship between the state and Aboriginal women (dominant sign to Othered sign), Aboriginal women and men (Othered sign to Othered sign), Aboriginal women with self and other Aboriginals (sign to sign).

The exercise of structural, hegemonic and disciplinary power was specifically located by Roundtable participants in the federal government and to a lesser extent male-dominated Aboriginal leadership in which power was conceived as uni-directional (2000: 6). The historical colonial relationship between the federal government and Aboriginals clearly featured as the primary source of discontent for participants. They criticized the federal government because of the lack of consultation prior to the Roundtable, accountability in decision-making, inappropriate use of language, the absence of Inuktitut simultaneous

translation from the beginning, the difficulties in attending by participants from remote or northern areas, and the presence of government participants (2000: 2, 10, 11). Participants expressly situated colonial relations in the context of gendered systems, in which the federal government exercised hegemonic power through competitive funding application processes that pitted Aboriginal women against each other, and non-recognition of the Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association as the national voice for Inuit women (2000: 2, 10, 11). Further, participants stated that the context and history of relations between Aboriginal women and the state continues to discipline Aboriginal women through limited sustained funding for research, advocacy and networking in areas related to status determination and Band membership for women, and legislation such as the *Indian Act.*[14] These mechanisms served to limit access, resources and the exchange of Aboriginal women's knowledge.

Further, liberal multiculturalists assume that power is uni-directional in which the exclusive focus on the state obscures power relations between Aboriginal women and men. Whilst the dominating power of the state over Aboriginal peoples is crucial to the current neo-colonial era, patriarchal and sexist relations within Aboriginal nations and communities also contribute to identification processes for Aboriginal women. First Nations women at the Roundtable specified First Nations male leadership as a source that produced subjugated identities (2000: 7, 10). Participants stated that some male leaders continued to support an exclusionary Band membership code, which only served to restrict the future growth of the status Indian population. In this, participants expressed concern that Aboriginal identity was made by government-imposed meanings and supported by some male leaders (2000: 6).

Participants also emphasized their interpersonal power, in which their identities were marked by non-discriminatory and non-victimized meanings. Other systems (such as spirituality, nationhood, communities, families, and language) were affective to their own sense of self, and arose through interaction with other Aboriginal people.[15] Participants indicated that these internal aspects of identity-making were mostly ignored by dominant meaning-makers, thus undermining their agency. Distinguishing between externally imposed and internally-made meanings thus was an important indication of power relations between

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[14] Specifically, the *Indian Act* destroyed highly organized and effective ways of governing according to matriarchal systems by dictating that Indian bands be governed by elected male band councils (Boyko, 1995: 181).

[15] This may be the kind authenticity that Taylor emphasizes but he falsely suggests that the authentic self of the past can be fully recovered.

Rita Dhamoon
'Cultural' v 'Culture': Locating Intersectional Identities and Power

Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals because it created space for the epistemologies of Aboriginal women.[16]

Intersecting Systems of Meaning-Making

Participants not only rejected essentialist categories of women and emphasized the multiplicity of systems of meaning-making, but they also stressed the relevance of intersectional systems of meaning-making. Their identities were not uni-dimensional (i.e. made up of either their gender or their culture), but rather they were shaped by multiple systems that intersected with one another. Participants did not, contrary to liberal multiculturalists, define themselves through distinct uni-dimensional categories that were isolated from each other; rather, they linked interactive sites of meaning-making. Whereas 'culture' restricts analysis to singular modes of oppression, 'cultural' more accurately addresses the multi-dimensional and intersecting systems that produced the identities of Aboriginal women.

Participants criticized the federal governments and SWC's notions of gender equality as well as the emphasis on gender equality itself because such notions depended on one-dimensional analysis grounded on colonial western liberal assumptions. The report states:

> Roundtable participants were also uncomfortable with many of the
> assumptions that concepts like feminism and gender equality are based on.
> Many felt that these words were grounded in an alien belief structure that
> shared little in common with the more holistic world-view of most
> Aboriginal people. Some suggested that the very notion of feminism is
> offensive, because it builds barriers between men and women while it
> erases or trivialized the commonalities that they share with one another
> (2000: 5).

Holding a Roundtable in English was in itself problematic for some participants because of western hegemonic assumptions about gender. One woman said "the first problem we face is language. Like gender equality, I can't stand it….Some of our languages don't even have words for male and female. And that is the number one problem, and so long as we're limited to that sort of language we'll have this problem" (2000: 5). In this, gendered meanings arose

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[16] This internal/external dichotomy whilst signifying of the colonial history experienced by Aboriginal peoples, suggests that there are fixed boundaries that define the inside and outside. The dichotomy between the insider/outsider can underestimate and suppress the tensions in familial, kinship, community sites of meaning-making. These sites of meaning-making are also contested sites and can produce imposed and oppressive internalized meanings.

through cultural contexts. Like liberal multiculturalism, the Canadian liberal states focus on gender equality emphasized one dimension of identity with totalizing inclinations that erased the interactive and compounding effect of systems of oppression faced by most Aboriginal women. One-dimensional analysis contributes to what Kimberle Crenshaw calls "intersectional invisibility", in which the interactions between gender and race discrimination become hidden and made imperceptible (Crenshaw, 2000).

Analysis of identity becomes particularly limited and fraught with essentialism when identity is classified through simplistic distinct categories unconnected to each other. This approach fails to address the specificity of Aboriginal women whose identities are formed through a host of interactive systems of meaning-making, including racism, colonialism, patriarchy, sexism, spirituality, nation, family and capitalism. In the context of the Roundtable, participants defined themselves in relation to the state as First Nations, Métis and Inuit women who were historically made and marked through gendered-racialized interactive discriminatory meanings. Gendered meanings did not come prior to racialized meanings and nor were they emergent from two separate systems of meaning-making. The report states "[c]oming to terms with gender-based discrimination against First Nations, Métis and Inuit women must be done in tandem with stopping racism from non-Aboriginal Canadians and government institutions" (2000: 4). For Aboriginal women, sexual discrimination was integral to the twin legacies of colonialism and racism so that gendered meanings emerged through racialized meanings and racialized meanings emerged through gendered meanings. This integrative approach does not make sense in the liberal multicultural use of 'culture' because of the simplifying tendencies that mark the Other through unitary and individualized categories, and yet it was foundational to the ways in which many Aboriginal women understood their identities and locations.

Even if liberal multiculturalists were to take interactive systems seriously, the only possible response to them is an additive response. An additive understanding of identity simply appends one dimension to another, in which the liberal multicultural singular, uni-dimensional and distinct categorization of identity is maintained. The critique against this additive approach has been led by feminists of colour who emphasize the simultaneity of

oppressions rather than adding singular categories to gender. [17] This additive response has been adopted by the federal government and is evident in policies of gender mainstreaming, policies that were the target of criticism for Roundtable participants. Gender mainstreaming situates gender as the primary axes of socio-political positioning (or meaning-making) and in which the distinctions and differences between women are diminished. Specifically, gender and culture are treated as independent systems that are added to each other to create 'gender + culture = Aboriginal woman'. [18] In the same vein, liberal multiculturalists would be limited to responding to multiple differences through this type of additive model because the interdependency of systems of meaning-making are masked through the emphasis on the distinct category of culture-as-ethnicity/nationality/language.

An additive approach maintains the notion that categories are unidimensionally distinct. This, however, constitutes a denial of fundamental intersections, and emphasizes difference without adequately locating relations of difference. Analysis of cultural processes demands that these relations are located. When forms of oppression become distinctly and independently categorized, there is neglect of interwoven systems of meaning-making. These systems reveal not only another dimension of the ethnic, national, and linguistic self but also the interactions between multiple modes of behavior and epistemology. These are shaped by fused, overlapping and coalescing systems of signification that go further than culture-as-ethnic/national/linguistic-Other. As such, there are not meanings of culture per se, but only cultural meanings as constructed by and between races, ethnicities, nationalities, genders,

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[17] This includes Gloria Hoguin Cuadraz and Lynet Uttal (1999), Patricia Hill Collins (2000), Kimberle Williams Crenshaw (1994), Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill (1997), Gloria Anzaldua (1999), bell hooks (1984), and Trinh Min-ha (1989).

[18] Key government documents on gender equality such as *Setting the Stage for the Next Century: The Federal Plan for Gender Equality* (the primary gender equality document at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in 1995), the response paper to the *Federal Plan* by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development on gender equality, and *Canadian Experience in Gender Mainstreaming* (a SWC paper which outlined the government's systematic approach to gender mainstreaming as it was articulated in the *Federal Plan*) are examples of such a liberal additive approach. All three documents feature race and class privilege in which gender mainstreaming did not necessitate a response to interactive systems of gendered racism, neo-colonialism, and socio-economic conditions faced by Aboriginal women. They present a relatively privileged position in which white actors (including white feminists) have a choice whether or not to address race-related concerns. For Aboriginal women the same kind of choice is not available. By choosing to focus on gender-based analysis and not responding to the intersectional interests and experiences of different Aboriginal women, SWC marginalized the compounding effect of interlocking systems of meaning-making that are oppressive.

classes, sexual orientations and abilities/disabilities.[19] Ultimately one-dimensional approaches and additive models replicate and reinforce the subordination of Aboriginal women by concealing compounding representations of power.

One Inuit woman at the Roundtable suggested that 'community well-being' should replace liberal and liberal feminist notions of equality because it more accurately described "women's efforts to promote equality and justice for themselves and their children" (2000: 5). 'Community well-being' seemed to capture the integration of women's issues beyond the framework of gender equality or equality of cultures to include spirituality (2000: 2), relations between men and women and children (2000: 5), economic development (2000: 5), and education (2000: 19) in a way that situated Aboriginal women as agents of meaning-making. Although the notion of 'community well-being' raises concerns of boundary-making (i.e. what is a community and who belongs in it), it nonetheless emphasizes that it was not just that participants wanted alternative meanings of equality but also that they questioned the entire emphasis on equality itself (2000: 5).

Theorizing Anti-Essentialist, Multiple and Interactive Systems of Signification

The Roundtable report illustrates that liberal multicultural interpretations of 'culture' are unable to deal with specific processes of identification and lived experiences because of essentializing tendencies. Culture is also assumed to embody only power that is unidimensional and one directional, thus erasing multiple (oppressive and enabling) systems of meaning-making. Further, culture is used in ways that underestimate the overlapping and compounding effect of interactive systems of meaning-making. The overall impact of this limited employment of 'culture' is both theoretical and material. Authoritative representations of Aboriginal women continue to mask differentiated contexts and meanings; the tensions between Aboriginal women are suppressed thereby concealing material inequalities; strategies of resistance become limited because of pressure to construct a homogenous and unified identity; systems of meaning-making activated by various Aboriginal women are marginalized hence undermining their legitimate status as political meaning-makers; dominant oppressive meanings are emphasized and Aboriginal women's

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[19] This idea is taken from Sandra Harding's argument that gender relations are constructed through relations of classes, races, and cultures (1991: 179).

agency is de-emphasized; Aboriginal women are forced to prioritize either gender or cultural heritage, thereby leading to neglect of interwoven and compounding systems of oppression; and privileged meanings are left outside of the analysis thus normalizing invisible and dominant meanings and meaning-makers.

Alternatively, the concept of 'cultural' would have changed the focus of the Roundtable so as to respond to the processes by which Aboriginal women's identities were Othered. Analysis of the 'cultural' processes of meaning-making reveals that it is necessary to develop theoretical tools that are anti-essentialist, and cognizant of multiple and interactive systems of meaning-making in order to describe and explain the identification processes of different Aboriginal women.

Anti-essentialism and an Alternative to Strategic Essentialism

One response, rooted in a politics of resistance, to the problems of essentialism in liberalism and liberal multiculturalism has been the strategic essentialist approach. Two leading thinkers of this approach include Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who advocates "strategic essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (1987: 205), and Stuart Hall who uses strategic essentialism as an effective strategy to redefine Englishness from the standpoint of different minority groups (1996). However, strategic essentialism has distortedly been treated as a theory rather than a strategy, and as such early thinking of strategic essentialism has become misunderstood and over-used. Specifically, strategic essentialism misleadingly suggests that essentializing for 'progressive' purposes (i.e. to make political demands and legal claims in order to achieve equality and inclusion) legitimizes essentialist meanings of culture without qualification of that reduced meaning. This, however, only holds true when dominant liberal multicultural interpretations of 'culture' are employed. 'Culture' suggests that signs need to be protected for the sake of cultural purity, cultural preservation, and self-realization (thus emphasizing the essentialized bounded group) when in fact cultural signs are actually evolving and being contested. *Since cultural signs are not permanent or fixed entities it is not the culture itself that is in jeopardy, but rather what is at stake is the self-determination and situatedness of agents to make their own systems of meaning-making and mark their own meanings in contexts of anti-subordination.* Strategic essentialism has certainly situated agents in politics through abridged meanings for

communicative ease or to make generalizations, but it has infact perpetuated essentialist meanings thus undermining the goal of anti-subordination.

The concept of 'cultural' illuminates the processes of making and marking, as well as the implications of these processes for socio-political positions and relations between socio-political positions. This requires that the focus be on the complex discursive practices that produce labels like 'Aboriginal women's culture' rather than the object of a culture. This is so that such meanings (that have simultaneously emerged as imposed, internalized, self-reflective, and oppositionally conscious meanings) are understood through the political and contested processes in which interactions between historical and contextual meaning-making takes place. In this, it is the role of agents as signs within systems of signification, as well as the processes by which signs emerge and become legitimate, that provides insights into the lives of Aboriginal women.

In order to attend to these relations of power, it may be necessary to (temporarily?) move away from the terminology of 'strategic essentialism' to an alternative concept which attends to goals of anti-essentialism (i.e. anti-subordination) *and* to the political necessity to speak about people in relations of power. I will name this 'relational reductionism' so as to locate reduced meaning as a consequence of relations of power. Whereas the concept of strategic essentialism depends on essentialist meanings in which the ultimate goal of making 'progressive' claims justifies essentialism, *the notion of relational reductionism begins by contextualizing the meaning in relational terms of power with an understanding and through accountability for what the reduced meaning represents.* In order to be accountable for reductionist meanings and what they represent, it is necessary to continuously assess the processes of meaning-making so that identities do not become naturalized and reified. Accountability is necessary in relational reductionism so that distinctions between various meanings are made. This is significant because not all reductionist meanings are equal – they represent interactive relations of power.

For example, the strategic essentialist meaning of 'woman' situates gender as the primary system in which markers such as the body, the sexual division of labour, and hetero-normativity make all women subordinate. 'Woman' is relationally situated with man, but with no recognition of other relations of power. The relational reductionist meaning of 'woman', on the other hand, acknowledges that signs that mark the agent are made in

relational contexts of power with men <u>and</u> other women. The relational reductionist use of 'woman' grants that some systems of meaning-making are positioned on the periphery as a consequence of locating 'woman' (e.g. race, capitalism, sexual orientation, and disability/ability). In the relational reductionist meaning, the relationship of power that reasserts the description of female oppression through the eyes of dominant white women is made visible, whereas in some strategic essentialist meanings this dominance is expunged. When employing the category of 'woman' it is thus necessary to acknowledge how the meaning has been reduced and to be accountable why. Being accountable both forces us to situate ourselves in the meaning-making process, and makes us aware of the limits of reductionist meanings.

The relational reductionist use of 'Aboriginal woman' also positions some systems of meaning on the periphery (e.g. sexual orientation, ability). However, such a meaning holds political significance in the context of the Roundtable because racism, colonialism, white supremacy, patriarchy and sexism are identified as the key systems of meaning-making. It thus situates the meanings associated with Aboriginal women through colonial histories in relation to Aboriginal men and the state. In this it is necessary for dominant sign-makers to be accountable for reductionist meanings attached to subordinated identities. By being accountable as dominant meaning-makers, rather than assuming the role of universal meaning-makers, space is made for Aboriginal women to exercise agency in constructing their own meanings of 'Aboriginal women'.

At the same time, it is necessary for Aboriginal women to be accountable for reduced meanings that exclude sexual orientation and ability (amongst other systems of meaning-making). This was done by participants who identified who was made invisible and inaudible by their absence at the Roundtable, which included disabled women, the youth, lesbians, Elders, and women who "don't necessarily represent any particular group" (2000: 10). As such, *it is necessary to be accountable for de-emphasizing some systems of meaning-making without erasing them*. In other words, it is critical to locate sexual orientation and disability in the analysis even if they are not the dominant systems of meaning-making. This locates the position of normalized and dominant systems of meaning-making. So for example, when employing 'Aboriginal women' it is important to that is category is made through privileged systems of hetero-normativity and ability/able-bodiedness, as well as oppressive systems of

gendering and racism. By locating which systems of meaning-making are most prominent, it is critical that the benefits that arise from systems of meaning-making that are less prominent (such as heterosexuality and able-bodiedness in the case of the Roundtable) are still acknowledged and positioned in the framework of analysis.

Conceptualizing relational reductionism does not grant all systems of meaning-making equal emphasis in all contexts. Indeed, relational reductionism is a conscious tool to address the actual experiences and social positions of Others through edited meanings but without eliminating the entire multitude of meanings. The importance of relational reductionism is that it serves as a tool that re-situates power as a dynamic force in which reduced meanings are produced. This enables theorists to avoid homogenizing systems of meaning-making in a way that merely re-centers some privileged meanings and de-centers other meanings.

Displacing Singular Models of Identification

Liberal multicultural approaches to culture situate Aboriginal women in unidimensional contexts of power, with an emphasis on the single axis of culture-as-ethnic/national/linguistic-difference. Black feminist Kimberele Crenshaw states that "the foregoing critique of the single-issue framework renders problematic the claim that the struggle against racism is distinguishable from, much less prioritized over, the struggle against sexism" (1989: 162). As a theoretical response it is necessary to displace single-axis analysis because of the primacy accorded to culture by liberal multiculturalists. This can be interpreted as a dangerous move both because of the immediate and significant impact of racism, colonialism and white supremacy as well as sexism and patriarchy. However, liberal multiculturalists have restricted and depoliticized the notion of culture, even when they use it to refer to the ethnic/national/linguistic-Other so that it has become void of power. Terms like 'multiculturalism' are presented through discourses of diversity in which the Other must be tolerated and accommodated (as a feature of modern day liberalism), rather than discourses of difference (in which relations of power that define Otherness are central). Cultural theorist Homi Bhabha points to the discourse of cultural difference that emphasizes power relations, which he contests, is not as evident in discourse of cultural diversity (1994: 32).

It is thus necessary to go beyond singular models of inquiry of identity/difference. Lessons from feminists of colour, who have challenged the singular focus on gender within feminism, are significant in this task. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, for example, urges feminists to examine the particularities and local lives of Third World women in order to specify and illuminate the universal (2003: 224). She states, "some writers confuse the use of gender as a superordinate category of analysis with the universalistic proof and instantiation of this category" (2003: 36). The possibilities of "egalitarian and noncolonizing cross-cultural scholarship" (2003: 224) can emerge through engaging with white feminists rather than leaving them comfortably situated with partial knowledge. Mohanty argues that when groups of women become homogenized and characterized by common dependencies or powerlessness, too little is said about their particular situation, and too much is said about women more generally (2003: 25). To attend to both the differences and universalities amongst identities, analytically gender as a dominant one-dimensional mode of analysis cannot remain the primary system of meaning of identity making or marking. Mohanty states, "To define feminism purely in gendered terms assumes that our consciousness of being "women" has nothing to do with race, class, nation, or sexuality, just with gender. But no one "becomes a woman" (in Simone de Beauvoir's sense) purely because she is female. Ideologies of womanhood have as much to do with class and race as they have to do with sex" (2003). Mohanty is right to contend that it is interactions of the various systemic networks of class, race, heterosexuality, rather than singular systems, which make and mark the position of women in different ways.

In the same way that some feminists of colour have displaced singular models of analysis, it is necessary for theorists of identity/difference to displace the singular emphasis on culture-as-ethnic/national/linguistic-Other. This notion of 'culture' detracts exploration of the multiple systems of meaning-making. 'Cultural', on the other hand, politicizes subjugated identities by locating multiple processes of subordination. This is necessary because one process of meaning-making cannot be understood outside of relations with other systems of meaning-making.

Interactive Sites of Meaning-Making

Analysis of interactive sites of meaning-making presents opportunities to conceptualize anti-subordination by moving away from essentialist meanings and incorporating multiple interactive systems. Drawing and building from Kimberle Williams Crenshaw's analysis of the intersectionality of gender and race discrimination (1994; 2000) and Patricia Hill Collins' notion of the matrix of domination (2000) I contend that theorizations of identity/difference should begin by situating all identities in matrices of power that are constructed through intersections. Crenshaw uses the metaphor of intersecting roads to refer to the multiple oppressions that intersect together in producing injustice. In this, systems of meaning-making interweave, overlap and collude to produce identities in specific ways to composite oppression. These multiple levels of identity-making, on occasion, need to be dissected in order to locate the processes of identification, but throughout, the compounding and interconnected effect of intersectional meaning-making needs to be considered. Collins describes the matrix of domination as the "overall social organization within which intersecting oppression originate, develop and are contained" (2000: 228-9). As intersecting oppressions take on historically specific forms, so the shape of domination itself changes. According to Collins, the matrix refers to the ways in which intersecting oppressions are organized (2000: 18). Both Crenshaw and Collins emphasize consciousness of group-based standpoints and subjective standpoints so that different levels of oppression and resistance are located.

By locating all identities in intersectional spaces within matrices of power – which are neither permanent nor fixed, although they can be time-endured and geographically specific – it is possible for us to pivot to view our own intersectionality from various perspectives as well as the intersectionality of others. From the location of our own intersectional space it is possible to see the roads that lead to the intersection. Sometimes we face particular roads or axis of subordination such as gender or race (Crenshaw, 2000), but always we are in some space of intersectionality. But we do not determine the constitution of the matrix alone, although we certainly impact and shape the matrix – interaction with others and existing arrangements of power shape the meanings given to our own intersections. It is through specific histories, dynamics, locations, and times that our intersectional spaces gain meaning that subordinate and/or privilege. The knowledge of our own intersectional space whilst similar to those who are constituted by analogous structures is not identical. From the

location of our own intersectional space it is possible to see the matrix of domination that frames relations of power. Thus through analyses of interactive sites of meaning-making, micro-level processes in which identities occupy social positions (the intersections) as well as macro-level connections between systems that socially stratify and mark identities (the matrix of power) become illuminated.

Furthermore, Collins and Crenshaw provide insight into the ways in which experiences of intersectionality within matrices of power contain few pure victims or oppressors (Collins, 2000: 287; Crenshaw, 1994: 101-103). Intersectional identities are located in matrices of power that are hierarchically organized in which most people are insiders and outsiders by virtue of intersectionality – one or more dimensions of meaning-making constructs an insider identity, whilst simultaneously one or more dimensions of meaning-making construct an outsider identity. For example, in the context of Canadian society, I am both marked by dominant insider signs by virtue of my English accent, my socio-economic status, my heterosexual marital status, and my able-bodiedness, and at the same time I am marked as a South Asian woman by subordinated outsider racist, colonial, sexist and patriarchal signs. I do not doubt that I have internalized both dominant and oppressive meanings. Further, I do not identically share all of the same meanings as other dominant or subordinated identities who are marked by heterosexuality, able-bodiedness, brown skin, or biological femaleness, although I am shaped through shared systemic signifiers such as racism and sexism. I am hence marked by privilege and oppression in which my knowledge is partial, incomplete, varied and changing. Specifically, it is necessary for me to recognize how at different points in my life, structures of domination and privilege have differentiated impact and salience.

By charting processes of identity-making through an interactive analysis in which power arrangements are constitutive, it becomes possible to differentiate moments and contexts of power. This shifts analysis from the duality of power or powerless, which oversimplifies the prohibitive and productive relations of power as well as the ways in which agents can be simultaneously oppressors and the oppressed. As such, interactive systems of meaning-making can produce either dominating or privileging meanings, or simultaneous dominating *and* privileging meanings. It is not simply that it is necessary to acknowledge that people encompass multiple dimensions to their identities and that essentialism conceals this

multiplicity; rather identities have to be conceptualized as signs of differential and hierarchical power. This is because it is not only that the meaning itself that matters, but also the saliency, intensity and interactions between identities matter because they carry meanings.

Locating interactive spaces enables a diverse range of understandings about how intersecting meanings come to be made and what they represent, thus avoiding the essentializing and homogenizing trap of liberal multiculturalism. From the perspective of dominant meaning-makers, interactive meaning systems tend only to be stimulated to make marginalized and underprivileged meanings. In these instances, intersectionality is made visible because it is over-used to reinforce oppressive meanings. This takes place in the context of gendered-racialized systems in which sexist and patriarchal practices are depicted as a central component of (an essentialized notion of) culture. Susan Moller Okin, for instance, argues that practices such as clitoridectomy, polygamy, and the forced marriages of children are oppressive and symptomatic of non-western cultures that are backward and patriarchal (1999). She concedes that the liberal west is still partially patriarchal, but continues to argue that the "traditions and cultures, including those practices within formerly conquered or colonized nation states - which certainly encompasses most of the peoples of Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, and Asia – are distinctly patriarchal" (1999: 14). In this, sex inequality is problematically theorized as the consequence of an entire culture when infact it is certain practices activated by some people that are sexist.[20]

Variations in meanings of intersectionality also take place within identities that are marked by subordination. From the perspective of Aboriginal women, intersecting gendered-racialized meanings are not homogeneous, and all Aboriginal women do not equally emphasize their gendered-racialised identities in all contexts. Differences in meanings that emerge from multiple experiences, identities and political perspectives lead to significant variations between Aboriginal women. For example, during the constitutional discussions known as the Canada Round, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC)

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[20] The racist and colonial subtext within Okin's argument that women of colour and Aboriginal women need to be protected from their 'backward' cultures has been widely critiqued by Bhiku Parekh (1999) and Homi Bhabha (1999) amongst others. Okin presupposes that non-western cultures-as-communities – which she acknowledges are not homogeneous – are distinctly less progressive than the supposed cohesive western community. Not only does Okin's west not include of those whose historical origins are non-western, but her use of culture-as-community reinforces an occidental gaze in which cultural domination continues through judgements about non-western cultures.

contested that their racialized-gendered identity needs would be well-served by participating in constitutional meetings, particularly to ensure *Charter* protection. Other Aboriginal women, including Mary Ellen Turpel (1989-90) and Patricia Monture-Angus (2002: 148) were highly critical of the *Charter*. NWAC was concerned that male dominated Aboriginal organizations would neglect their needs as Aboriginal women, and Turpel/Monture-Angus contended that NWAC (as well as other Aboriginal organizations like the AFN) were modeled on the colonizers ways of political organization. Both NWAC and Aboriginal women scholars like Turpel and Monture-Angus employed an intersectional conception of their identities within the context of colonial relations, but each emphasized differing meanings. They both contested the forced choice between self-determination of culture and sex equality so that the ramifications of experiencing racial and sexual oppression as combined and integral oppressions did not become tangential.

Theorizing intersectional spaces of meaning-making within a matrix of power also has the advantage of illuminating and locating the intersectional invisibility of dominant identities in which whiteness and maleness (for example) are normalized and concealed. Since we are all produced and reproduced through interactive systems of meaning-making – whether this is through oppressive and/or privileging systems – it is necessary to locate which dominant and subordinated intersections become invisible. Once it is acknowledged that we are all in intersectional spaces not only do oppressive systems and meanings become illuminated, but so do privileging systems. This does not preclude emphasizing some systems of meaning-making over others in specific contexts (e.g. Aboriginal women at the Roundtable legitimately emphasized systems of racism, colonialism, and sexism in the context of a state-organized consultation). Instead it requires that all identities are located in the centre (i.e. the intersection), and attention is paid to the contexts in which some identities take on meanings that situate them on the periphery (i.e. the matrix of power). This forces dominant identities to be located even through invisible and normalized systems such as whiteness, heterosexuality, maleness, wealth, ability/able-bodiedness.

Conclusion

Liberal multicultural interpretations of the culture-concept have come to signify essentialist, singular, and distinct categories of identity that are unconnected to each other.

Specifically, 'culture' has adopted a reductionist component that over-emphasizes the ethnic/nation/linguistic-Other and essentializes groups of people. The concept of cultural, which I develop by drawing upon anthropology and cultural studies, alternatively illuminates the complex processes by which identities become constituted and marked. The case study on the Aboriginal women's roundtable provides evidence that cultural identities are constituted through processes that are multi-dimensional, interactive, and imbued with power. To attend to these cultural processes of signification and their resultant meanings, I have identified some key theoretical moves that are necessary when theorizing identity/difference. These include accountability for relational reductionist meanings, replacing singular modes of analysis with analysis of multiple relations of power, and examining interactive sites of signification.

The shift from 'culture' to 'cultural' ultimately repositions the focus of identity/difference from the restricted politics of Othered cultures to the production of cultural identities and relations in frameworks of power. As a result, it becomes possible to move beyond a politics of inclusion that underpins Kymlicka's theory of minority rights and Taylor's theory of recognition. Jo-Anne Lee and Linda Cardinal aptly state that "inclusion transfers attention onto those who 'need' to be included and away from practices of exclusion. Responsibility for 'absence' is shifted onto those 'not here'. Actual exclusionary practices that need to be identified, named and dismantled remain untouched" (1998: 225). This paper has sought to offer a key way to locate these exclusionary practices through the concept of cultural.

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