

CHAPTER 14

DISCURSIVE PLURALITY

NEGOTIATING CULTURAL IDENTITIES IN PUBLIC DEMOCRATIC DIALOGUE

Mary Jane Collier & Darrin Hicks

ABSTRACT. This paper is an attempt to reconcile the gap between our practical and theoretical knowledge. The authors begin by briefly describing and critiquing the traditional conceptualizations of democratic disagreement: conflicts of interest and conflicts of principle. They then propose that the dilemmas in democratic practice engendered by intercultural contact necessitate a new conceptualization of democratic disagreement that can account for discursive plurality. This account of democratic disagreement – which the authors term “conflicts over political speech” – demands that we turn our attention towards exploring how cultural identities are enacted and negotiated through plural discursive systems. The authors conclude by discussing the implications of these assumptions, as well as interrogating our own received presuppositions about the interface between cultural identity and political participation, for constructing a transformative model of public democratic dialogue.

When members of different groups come together as a political community to solve a pressing social problem or to resolve a divisive conflict, they, more often than not, begin (and, too often, end) their democratic dialogues with the questions about what is “true”. Factual accuracy, while important, is simply an insufficient basis for public deliberation. Democratic communities, in particular those constituted by a diverse citizenry, face social problems that are simply too complex to be solved through factual inquiry alone. The problems, though keenly felt, are dynamic; to even begin engaging them mandates the creation of social learning processes.

Moreover, the conflicts that divide citizens are rarely conflicts over what is *true* – they are often multifaceted disputes over what is *just*. Interpretations of what is just are always conditioned by the traditions and social practices that constitute conceptions of the good, and these conceptions of the good are in turn mediated through our cultural identities. Therefore it stands that group members will legitimately disagree over what is just and that this disagreement will not be resolved through some ideal of universal reason or rational choice. Rather, justice, if it is to be redeemed as a standard that could reconcile division, will have to be understood as a problem of coordinating communicative action in a pluralist society.

In this paper we contend that inquiry about public dialogue and deliberation is strengthened when we recognize the current socio-cultural

global environment. Here technological and economic advances as well as changing political landscapes have made access to and contact between different cultural groups and multiple discursive systems the rule rather than the exception. As a result political discourse is marked by diversity in interests, principles, and in ideas about appropriate conduct and procedures. If scholars of and participants in public deliberation recognize that the interaction is inherently a process characterized by negotiating, promoting, and challenging group identities, they will know that such communicative processes involve a plurality of discursive systems and preferences. Unfortunately, our practical knowledge of discursive plurality – the fact that the forms and functions of political discourse are as plural as the conceptions of the good it is called on to reconcile – has yet to adequately inform the extant theoretical models of democratic disagreement and conflict resolution.

This paper is an attempt to reconcile this gap between our practical and theoretical knowledge. We begin by briefly describing and critiquing the traditional conceptualizations of democratic disagreement: conflicts of interest and conflicts of principle. We then propose that the dilemmas in democratic practice engendered by intercultural contact necessitate a new conceptualization of democratic disagreement that can account for discursive plurality. This account of democratic disagreement – which we term conflicts over political speech – demands that we turn our attention towards exploring how cultural identities are enacted and negotiated through plural discursive systems. We conclude by discussing the implications of these assumptions, as well as interrogating our own received presuppositions about the interface between cultural identity and political participation, for constructing a transformative model of public democratic dialogue.

Models of democratic disagreement (a) and (b): Conflicts of interest and conflicts of principle.

Traditionally, political and social theorists have conceptualized democracy and political disagreement, in particular, from within an interest-based model of politics. Interest-based models understand democracy as a process where individuals express their preferences, compete with others so that their preferences will influence the formation of public policy, and register those preferences in a vote (Young 1996).

Two basic assumptions that differentiate interest-based models of democracy from their republican and deliberative counterparts are a

commitment to methodological individualism and the definition of successful democratic decision-making as the result of the competition between coalitions for self-interested votes. Interest-based models posit that individuals form their interests without regard to others' needs. The rational political actor justifies her or his conduct by weighing the costs and benefits of risk and precaution in terms of "willingness to pay" and considers others needs, preferences and desires only when they stand to further or lessen her or his own. In democratic decision-making, then, individuals and interest groups formulate and vote for policies that will best further their own private interests, fully expecting that all others will do the same. Interest-based models conceive of politics as a contest among power seekers. Political power is achieved through influencing the formation of individual preferences and having the ability to marshal those preferences into the service of one's own interests.

Given that the presence of a plurality of individuals and groups with competing interests, desires, and needs is an interminable aspect of democratic politics, conflict between political actors is seen as a natural and even necessary aspect of politics. When there is a moderate scarcity of desirable social goods, political actors have to compete for resource allocation. Moreover, when one individual's or group's actions restrict or negatively impact another individual's or group's actions, those parties will engage each other in a contest to see whose will shall prevail. Democratic institutions transform these contests into legal battles over the allocation of rights and responsibilities. These rights and responsibilities, within an interest-based conception, are reduced to the status of resources to be allocated amongst the parties. This competition for rights and resources and the ensuing conflicts that it engenders constitutes what is commonly described as a "conflict of interest".

In conflicts of interest, parties contest the outcome of administrative decisions, and, hence the application of a set of principles for allocating resources. Yet, what is, for our purposes, the distinguishing feature of conflicts of interest, is that the parties typically respect the authority of the decision-making body, the procedures used to determine allocation, and the principles used to justify social policy. That is, while these conflicts can become extremely protracted, the parties do not challenge the authority of the decision-making body to adjudicate the dispute. There is also a general agreement about the procedures used to settle these disputes. The standards of evidence as well as the types of reasons that can be advanced are respected. In short, in conflicts of interest both the principles for determining resource allocation and for regulating the communicative actions of those

parties competing for advantage, are affirmed.

Examples of conflicts of interest abound. Many disputes over property rights, resource allocation, the burdens of paying for public utilities, and the distribution of risk can be understood as conflicts of interest (although, as we will argue, these conflicts have moral and communicative dimensions that are often rendered invisible because they are too defined as conflicts of interest).

Framing political disagreement in terms of conflicts of interest also shapes the models of dispute resolution that we invent and favour. When political disagreement is understood as the competition for personal advantage, the favoured methods of dispute resolution will be negotiation and strategic bargaining. If political disagreement is understood as primarily arising from the problems of resource scarcity, and thus, resolved by fair and efficient resource allocation, negotiated rule making and arbitration will serve as the dominant methods of conflict management.

What marks each of these models of political disagreement as conflicts of interest, is that their success relies upon a strong, centralized and undisputed decision-making agent and an authoritative set of rules of communicative engagement. However, as we will argue, the authority of extant decision-making agents and rules of communicative engagement have themselves increasingly become the source of political disagreement, particularly in cases of cultural politics. In such cases, which we call conflicts of principle and conflicts of political speech respectively, not only do interest-based models of dispute resolution fail to adequately address the heart of the political conflict, their application may in fact work to intensify the conflict, as well.

However pervasive conflicts of interests are in contemporary societies, the new forms of political struggle accompanying the introduction of democratic norms and practices into the workplace, the family, and sexual relations over the last thirty years demonstrate that an interest-based model of political conflict fails to account for the most interesting and increasingly important forms of democratic disagreement. Many political disagreements now seem to be rooted in much “deeper” differences than conflicts of interest. As the cultural and religious diversity of the citizenry grows, through both migration and enfranchisement, the diversity of collective aims, moral outlooks, received knowledges, and worldviews grows. It is no longer reasonable to assume that a shared moral and political framework exists to guide public deliberation and debate. As the new social movements have demonstrated, the political vocabularies used to frame issues and propose solutions as well as the legitimacy of extant procedures for

resolving political conflicts, are often the source, rather than the cure, of political disagreement.

Following James Bohman (1995), we call these disputes over the authority of decision centres, the principles of adjudication, and the principles of justice underwriting social policy, “conflicts of principle”. Conflicts of principle differ from conflicts of interest in that parties disagree not only because they have divergent needs and desires but because they construct their identities from incommensurate moral orders and social grammars, an incommensurability that both constitutes and intensifies the divergence in their worldviews and interests. Hence, traditional methods of dispute resolution, which attempt to reconcile interests through formulating mutually acceptable compromises, are of little use when applied to conflicts of principle. In conflicts of principle parties not only differ in regard to some issue, but disagree on how to go about resolving their conflict (Pearce & Littlejohn 1997). They disagree over what counts as evidence and what conditions must hold to qualify a policy or project as just. Moreover, one or more of the parties often refuse to respect the authority of those who sit in judgment. In short, political disputes become conflicts of principle when they go beyond conflicts about particular beliefs or interests and focus directly on the principles of adjudication. Conflicts of principle, if deep enough, seem to radically question the very possibility of democratic resolutions.

The struggle over land rights between Australian Aborigines and a mining company as documented in Werner Herzog’s film *Where Green Ants Dream* is an illustrative example of a conflict of principle (Reading 1992). The mining company possessed “legal” ownership of the land and wished to begin excavation. The Aborigines, however, claimed that the land was sacred burial ground, and therefore attempted to stop all mining operations. This dispute was not simply over who owned the land, which would be a conflict of interest, that the notion of property as such is the locus of the conflict; hence, there is a conflict of principle.

When this dispute came before the court the judge ordered the Aborigines to produce evidence for their claim that the land was sacred. They responded that they could not present the objects that could verify that the ground was indeed sacred, because to look at these objects was a sin that would result in the death of the viewer. At that point an Aborigine man referred to as the “Mute” stood up and began to speak. The judge was perplexed. He asked why he was referred to as a “Mute” if he could speak. The other Aborigines replied that was because he is the sole surviving member of his tribe, so no one else could speak his language and he could not speak the language of anyone else. The judge then turned to the Aborigines and told them that because they failed to produce any legal title or evidence of the lands’ sacredness and the “Mute’s” testimony was untranslatable, he had no recourse but to rule in favour of the mining company. The Aborigines implored the judge to step outside of the

boundaries of the law to adjudicate the dispute, but he refused.

Herzog's film does not present the Aborigines as mere losers in a legal battle. Rather, the aborigines have been injured because the principles defining justice in terms of property and the evidentiary procedures used to adjudicate the conflict systematically divested them of the means to present their case.

We understand recent attempts to formulate a deliberative account of democracy as a response to the demands of the deep pluralism signalled by conflicts of principle (Bohman 1996; Dryzek 1990; Rawls 1993; Gutmann & Thompson 1996). Deliberation is understood in these models as a process by which individual convictions are translated to public reasons. Deliberative democrats view deliberation as a method for regulating disagreement and resolving differences of principle through critical discussion, which is a method that shifts political power from a basis in interest groups and ethical commitments to an institutional framework constituted by a set of rules for managing difference.

We endorse deliberative approaches inasmuch as they acknowledge the constitutive force of communication (i.e., communication is never merely the transmission of information, but in most cases involves the constitution of a meaningful order of persons and things). This view of communicative action serves to re-specify justice as a problem of, and, more importantly as the result of, coordinating communicative interaction in a diverse society in which particular histories and collective memories are constituted. By grounding democracy on a model of public debate, rather than a model of strategic bargaining, deliberative models can offer a constructive answer to the question of how diverse groups are to mediate their differences. Deliberation is, thus, a superior alternative for mediating political disagreement in a pluralist democracy compared with strategic bargaining, arbitration, voting and other forms of dispute resolution, grounded in an interest-based conception of democracy.

We part ways with deliberative theories, however, when they privilege one form of discourse – namely critical-rational discussion – over all others. We concur with Iris Marion Young's (1996) claim that the valorization of deliberation over other discursive forms such story-telling, rhetoric, or conversation (to name but a few) may actually work as a form of cultural imperialism, silencing minority voices by devaluing the methods of expression, bodily comportment, and modes of self-presentation of groups whose views have already been systematically disregarded in public forums. Thus, ironically, deliberative norms may actually foreclose the possibility of

a radically democratic dialogue.

Deliberative theories often mistakenly conceptualize discourse as a relatively stable, univocal, phenomenon. That is, they overlook the fact that modes of communication are irreducibly plural. Conversation, debate, discussion, narrative and poetic speech are not simply different “forms of expression”, but rather each of these genres of communication is constituted by different norms, functions and effects. Furthermore each genre activates a different moral and political universe establishing distinctive rights, obligations and orientations to the other. For instance, think of the many functions that the question can have and how the form, function, and effects of the question are shaped by the trajectory of the speech genre in which it is embedded. It makes all of the difference in the world if a question is part of a cross-examination, a narrative, a casual conversation among friends, a visa application, an inquisition, a doctoral examination or police interrogation. Each of these speech genres depends on questions to do their work, but each assigns radically different roles, rights, responsibilities, and strategies, to the speakers. To unproblematically assume that the question functions innocently in deliberation – and to assume questions work only to clarify parties’ positions – , is to turn a blind eye to the experience of having a discussion turn into an interrogation, a trial into an inquisition, or worse.

Given the irreducible plurality of religious, philosophical, political, and moral views animating contemporary societies, it is not surprising that political philosophers would theorize discourse monologically. Discourse, for contemporary political philosophy, serves as the Archimedean point¹ by which the other forms of plurality can be reconciled. In other words, discourse must be theorized as a stable, non-plural phenomenon, for it to serve as the foundation of a democratic theory that fully accepts the “fact of reasonable pluralism” (Rawls 1993) and that views its mission as devising a scheme by which these diverse views can be reconciled without coercion.

We need to recognize, as well, that parties in real political disputes operate with a number of co-present orientations to public discussion, and that these orientations even tend to be inconsistent. The commitment to politeness norms, for instance, works in tandem with the rational presupposition of unforced consensus. In real talk we juggle the need to

¹ The Hellenistic mathematician and physicist Archimedes (287-212 BCE) is reputed to have boasted:

Give me a place to stand and I will move the earth

Hence the common philosophical usage of the expression “Archimedean point” for any (claim of an) objective, fixed position from which to make a comparison or a judgement. Many modern philosophers, meanwhile, have come to consider such a claim unwarranted and obsolete. (Eds.)

make decisions based on the force of the better argument with the need to forge social cooperation by holding our tongues. Just how we juggle these sometimes conflicting interests is what makes real talk so much more complex than any theoretical system of designed speech. By reducing the complexity of actual communicative action to a relatively univocal model of critical discussion and by ignoring the plurality of discursive forms co-present in any attempt to mediate differences of principle, deliberative models may actually negate the very advantages they purport to accrue.

Conflicts of principle present a formidable challenge to reflexive scholars and practitioners committed to designing discursive methods and forums capable of transforming potentially violent and divisive political strife into productive and peace-oriented dialogue, a dialogue in which the differences separating groups are seen as resources rather than obstacles for constructing a shared, yet heterogeneous, ethical vision. To meet this challenge we must first abandon the effort to justify democratic principles by appealing to universal standards of reason and rational choice. Instead, we must uncover the specific and multiple cultural and historical traditions that constitute a community's political lexicon. Second, we must not make the mistake of reifying these traditions; instead, we must remind ourselves that they were constituted through searching dialogue and debate, and that only in the present have they become taken-for-granted procedures for coordinating action. The seeds of revision and reform exist in the forms of practical reason animating communal life. Therefore, principles of justice and procedures of adjudication can be remade and re-imagined in and through public dialogue.

Conflicts of interest and conflicts of principle are widely recognized as challenges that are faced by democratically oriented groups. Inattention to discursive plurality, however, often leads theorists and practitioners to ignore a third, and we believe an increasingly important, form of democratic disagreement and, hence, to overlook the communicative resources for constructing a transformative model of intercultural dialogue.

Models of democratic disagreement (c): conflicts of political speech

Just as the emergence of new social movements revealed the plurality of, and hence the conflict over, political principles, what Tully (1995) – in indebtedness to Taylor – calls the “politics of cultural recognition” points us to the plurality of, and hence conflict over, political speech. The intercultural demands that constitute much of contemporary politics range from the

establishment of schools, social services and media in one's first language to the struggle for the right to

 speak and act in culture-affirming ways in public institutions and spheres (Tully 1995: 2).

Let us grant that the right to participate in political institutions in ways that recognize and affirm, rather than exclude or assimilate, culturally diverse ways of speaking, thinking, and acting of citizens, is a prerequisite to political freedom and democratic governance. It then follows that many of our political institutions will have to be rebuilt from the ground up, because they were originally constructed to privilege the traditions of argumentation and modes of speaking of white, propertied males.

Moreover, that cultural groups are internally heterogeneous; they are also constituted in and through a plurality of ways of speaking, thinking and acting. Therefore, the primary mode of political disagreement in the twenty-first century CE may be *conflicts over the forms and effects of political speech*, rather than over interest or principle. The complexity of the problem, most notably its recursiveness, is signalled by the difficulty in coining a succinct term to describe such conflicts. In conflicts over political speech, the rules and norms controlling the speaking opportunities afforded to parties, the performative standards for formulating speech acts, and the limits of what discourses can be heard as authentic and true are opened to challenge, re-evaluation, and revision. At the very least, because the conventions governing speech will have to be ratified to some degree by all parties prior to engaging in deliberation over interest or principles, discursive conflicts will come to occupy a great deal of time and energy of both established and newly forming democracies.

Cultural group identification and discursive plurality

When community members meet and deliberate with one another, they do so as individuals who speak as, and speak for, various groups. Group or cultural identities are enacted through the social discourse, and are both the foundation from which and the creative ongoing accomplishment in which political standpoints are articulated. Group members speak, in part, with voices based on who they are and what they know, and norms that group members bring to public meetings about what is appropriate and effective conduct. In addition, inter-group norms are contested and co-constructed by multiple parties in their discourse throughout their contact, and are as varied and diverse as the individuals that comprise the groups.

Cultural identities in these contexts are broadly viewed as ongoing problematics, social enactments, and performances, in the sense that group identifications are social and observable. When members of different groups meet, the engagement is a

participatory ritual performance in which actors not only pursue interests strategically and display themselves expressively, but reproduce and reconstitute social and political relationships with one another (Forester 1996: 309)

Cultural identities are enacted in spontaneous as well as strategic forms, and are featured, hidden, challenged, and negotiated, in the emerging discourse as members of the public engage each other.

Culture is more than visible group affiliation in that it is a set of enduring and changing, ideological and institutional, interpretive, constitutive, and creative, situated norms and practices, shared by a group of people who enact their paradoxical affiliations with, and distinctions from, other groups (Collier 1999a). Our approach to culture focuses primarily upon the communicative or discursive system that constitutes identity affiliation or characterization; but this is not to suggest that multivocality or individual differences within the group are not acknowledged. It is to say that patterns among those who affiliate with a particular group, as well as individual differences, do emerge, and those patterns are apparent to insider members of the group as well as outsiders. Tajfel (1978), Tajfel & Turner (1979), and Giles (1980) discuss the tendency among humans to define social identities in inter-group terms and to use social comparisons to designate group insiders and outsiders. What interests us is the multiple forms and outcomes in which the character of the group identities and the relationships between groups emerge in democratic dialogues.

If we recognize that language is articulate contact (Stewart 1995), it follows that discourse is used to construct “realities”, that include histories, relationships, and social identities (Shotter 1993). Symbolic activity is the forum through which we come to know about ourselves and others, as individuals and members of multiple groups, and we learn and revise what is valued, prescribed, and prohibited.

Discourse, therefore, is the means through which we constitute and negotiate political and institutional policies as well as norms for localized political practice. Billig (1995) as well as Jenkins (1997) point out that nationalism and ideology as broader structural processes, are reflected in situated discourse about what is strongly valued, moral, normal, respectable, and sinful. Van Dijk (1993) specifically points to the forms and functions of elite discourse dominating newspapers, televised news, as well as textbooks

and conversational texts, which become the sites of cognitive transformation and racism as well as the reproduction of ideologies and institutional policies within and across groups in various kinds of social contact.

Let us agree that cultural norms and premises emerge in discourse that is constrained by histories and past experiences, present power relations, externally imposed ascriptions, and internally avowed boundaries. Let us moreover agree that such norms and premises are enacted within co-constructed relationships. Then it becomes evident that we must incorporate multiple levels of analysis into an approach to cultural identity negotiation in public democratic dialogue. Therefore, following Giddens (1984), we recognize the role of the institution, group and relationship, and the individual, in interaction and production of discursive systems. For example, sometimes privileged groups exert influence upon groups and individuals through establishing a particular norm of conduct that becomes rewarded, if not the required standard within many institutions.

In the traditional deliberative model in the USA, individualism is valued and privileged, and the ability to be a strong adversary and have a critical voice is esteemed. Tannen (1998) describes this tendency in the USA as “the argument culture”. Basing her conclusions on popular discourse in multiple forms, she describes the educational as well as political systems as institutions that socialize USA Americans to value individually-expressed critical ability.

Our glorification of opposition as the path to truth is related to the development of formal logic, which encourages thinkers to regard truth seeking as a step-by-step alternation of claims and counterclaims. Truth, in this schema, is an abstract notion that tends to be taken out of context. (Tannen 1998: 260).

She also notes what she describes as seemingly automatic inclinations among individuals in the USA to oppose, criticize, and verbally assault political leaders.

In summary, as humans, we constitute our political standpoints, make community decisions, and constitute our group identities and relationships with each other in historical, institutional, and structural contexts, as well as in everyday contact with one another. Cultural identity is the character of the communicative system that is contextually constructed by those affiliating with a particular group in social contact such as that in public deliberation. Below, we describe several of our assumptions about how cultural identities are enacted and negotiated through plural discursive systems, and discuss the implications of such assumptions for political dialogue.

In meetings in which community members gather to make decisions, cultural identities are avowed and proclaimed by “insider” group members

as well as ascribed by “outsiders” and “Others”; and often such avowals and ascriptions are quite different and become contested. Cultural identities are thus constructed in the “spaces” and “moments of time” in contact between group members. A second assumption we make about intercultural contact is that cultural identities are constituted over time and to some degree, endure as well as change (Collier & Thomas 1988; Hecht et al. 1993). Cultural identities are enacted in local, dynamic contexts, in which histories are invoked as well as futures predicted. Such contexts include and go beyond the immediate environmental context (such as who is interacting with whom in what location), and also include the chronology of past, present, and predicted future, that are socially constructed. Histories of groups both enable and constrain actions, they determine to a considerable extent who says what to whom, what kind of relationship is created, as well as what consequences emerge.

An illustration will be taken from a pre-conference session for representatives from organizations working with youth in Israel and Palestine in 1998. The location of the meeting, Jerusalem, was not only contested and difficult, if not impossible, for some of the Palestinians to visit, but also the definitions of what the meeting meant to each group, and histories about such meetings, were understood very differently. For many of the Palestinians, it was precluded that the pre-conference session could produce satisfying contact and dialogue, not only due to conflicts of interest and principle, but based on such interpretations of the past and predictions for future dialogue as would limit their agency, and silence or disconfirm their preferred identities (Collier 1999b).

A further assumption important in this context is that we assume the existence of multivocality within as well as across cultural group members. Martin (1997), among others, researching Whites in the USA, points out that while members of high status and privileged groups acknowledge the diversity and a range of voices within their own group, they often minimize the multivocality present in out-groups, and view out-group members as almost faceless representations, as “Others” who are essentially alike. These kinds of categorizations are often expressed in over-generalized and overly simplistic stereotypes, and serve to discount individual agency, limit the potential for counter-hegemony, and minimize the heterogeneity of group voices. In this way, the discourse is the means through which some voices are privileged and others may be silenced.

Other important assumptions we make about cultural identity negotiation in intercultural democratic dialogue are that individuals have more than one cultural identity that may be potentially enacted in each situation; and that multiple cultural identities affect and emerge in group members’ conduct across contexts. McClintock (1995), in a feminist critique, calls for researchers to recognize the intersections and relationships between gender,

race, and class characterizing our contact. She discusses the voices of women of colour who challenge Eurocentric feminism, who argue that it is inappropriate to talk of an essential female (or male) character, to privilege gender over other conflicts, or continue using the categories of race, ethnicity and class to benefit and justify the existence of the middle and upper classes.

The range of cultural identities that can be salient, and the twists and turns in identities being featured, depend upon topic, context, and the emerging patterns in the dialogue. In a 1992 study of South Africans, focus group participants avowed their ethnic identity in explicit ways using phrases such as “As an Afrikaner...” or, “I am Zulu and we believe in...” Racial designators were more commonly used when describing others. Topics such as “the new South Africa being constructed in 1992” brought out variations in avowed and ascribed identities ranging from recognition of shared nationality, ascription of distinct differences in race, ethnicity, and social class, as well as disagreement about what it meant to be male or female (Collier & Bornman 1999). One “Coloured” young woman described in the same study said,

I am like many people in one person. I am South African, Coloured, speak three languages, am middle class, a woman, and hope to be a mother who will have a successful career. I sometimes speak from one of these and at other times, I am all of these.

This example illustrates how, from the perspective of individual group members at a community meeting, one or a few cultural identities may take precedence or become more salient than others. It also illustrates the possible consequences when recognized leaders/facilitators of public meetings, with intentions for fairness and justice, design and implement agendas and procedures to meet the needs for the different race groups represented at the meeting may in practice, limit the agency of some group members to feature class or gender identities and issues.

If individuals have a range of cultural identities, this does not imply that ontologically we assume all people to have the ability to change identities like chameleons change colour to blend into their surroundings; nor does it imply that humans react to others and/or the environment in mere deterministic fashion. We presume that individuals have individual agency as well as interact in social contexts that are constrained by histories, social structures, institutions and ideologies. Some individuals have greater freedom and choice to feature particular identities and ignore others.

In our personal case as authors of this paper, as scholars who are European American, our respective ethnic heritages are not particularly salient to either one of us in our everyday conduct, and we can choose to feature or not mention our ethnic heritage as we so desire.

This kind of agency is a form of unearned and often unrecognized advantage for members of some groups, i.e., it does not occur to most Whites in the USA that race is important or that it is the standard by which other groups are judged, since it becomes “invisible” and a “taken for granted” (Hitchcock & Flint 1997).

As Foucault has pointed out, discourse is the site or process in which resources are sought, maintained, allocated to others, and contested; therefore, in the context of public and democratic deliberation, we need to acknowledge the role of power and privilege in negotiating multiple identities through discourse. Individuals constitute who they are as group members, in part through what resources they have and are given by others, and through the ability to obtain or distribute resources. We also agree with McClintock who calls on scholars to study

...a more diverse politics of agency, involving the dense web of relations between coercion, negotiation, complicity, refusal, dissembling, mimicry, compromise, affiliation, and revolt (McClintock 1995: 15).

Sometimes cultural identities are contested and conflict with one another. Hegde (1998a) found that while Asian Indian women immigrants in the USA may be rewarded within their own community when they take on more traditional roles and *a fortiori* when, in the process, they produce sons, their success as women is also measured by the standard set by European American women who are expected to combine motherhood with having a respectable job or profession.

A common pattern in intercultural relationship development is based on initial negative, over-generalized, stereotypes about the “Other”. Collier (1998a) describes the discourse of Israeli, Palestinian and Palestinian/Israeli young women who worked on various projects and spent time together; the avowals and ascriptions that made up their discourse were complex, paradoxical, and sometimes brought up in-group conflict as well as in-group/out-group conflict. Hybridity of identities was apparent in the voices of Palestinian/Israelis who live in Israel and have Israeli identification cards and trace their ancestry and cultural roots to Palestine. They described their identities as

“living in two worlds” or “seeing things from both sides as well as the middle” and “having no home and nobody who accepts us, not Israelis because of our roots, not Palestinians sometimes because of where we live” (Collier 1999b).

The process of intercultural identity negotiation is a complex and multifaceted one. For every individual representing a group, multiple identities may emerge as salient, and some identity norms for what is viewed as appropriate conduct may conflict. Relationships with other individuals as well as inter-group dialogue require an appreciation for the many levels of

discourse and variations in normative force across institutions, communities, relationships and individuals.

Intercultural identity negotiation and conflicts over political speech

Robert Reed's (1990) investigation of the counter-revolutionary effects of formal rules of debate in Portuguese Municipal Assemblies provides a telling example of an intercultural identity conflict over political speech. In 1976, two years after Portuguese military officers overthrew Antonio Salazar's six year corporatist regime in a bloodless coup, the Portuguese people ratified a revolutionary constitution. The latter established a democratic government comprised of a system of municipal assemblies. "In these assemblies, people of all walks were to meet as equals to discuss and resolve local issues" (Reed 1990: 134). To fulfil the revolution's promise, the new Assembly had to make decisions based on a fair hearing of members' opinions. To organize discussion and to adjudicate conflicts of opinion the Assembly adopted Robert's Rules of Order.²

The adoption of Robert's Rules, however, created a division within the Assembly. On the one hand, there were members who were comfortable using Robert's Rules and were adept at manipulating them to their advantage. These members were referred to as *Politicos* ("real politicians"). On the other hand, some members were extremely uncomfortable using Robert's Rules. These members, referred to as "Officeholders", refused to conduct their discussion according to the formal rules and generally remained silent during Assembly meetings. Reed (1990) found that the distinction between "Politicos" and "Officeholders" cut across class, cultural, and political lines. The cleavages between members was, instead, primarily constituted by the desire to use formal rules of deliberation, and the capacity for manipulating them. Though Robert's Rules are designed to ensure that all members have an opportunity to engage in a fair and efficient form of political debate, they set an "admission price" that is much costlier to some members than others.

Reed argues that the reason that "Officeholders" did not comply with Robert's Rules is that these formal conventions struck them as a

strange, confusing, and very artificial way of organizing debate. At times the Rules strike them as simply unfair (Reed 1990: 137).

² In 1876, USA army general Henry M. Robert set out to bring the rules of the American Congress to members of ordinary societies with the publication of *Pocket Manual of Rules of Order*. It sold half a million copies even before its revision in 1915, and made Robert's name synonymous with the orderly rule of reason in deliberative societies. (Eds.)

The introduction of formal procedural constraints into public debate in the Portuguese Assembly thwarted the peoples desire that all members have an equal voice. Thus while the Assembly members may have been equally elected, the imposition of Robert's Rules insures that they are not all equally effective. In this sense, we can say the introduction of a deliberative model of democracy, albeit in a very particular form, was counterrevolutionary.

Reed's (1990) description of the ways that procedural constraints can silence some participants and disregard their cultural identities shows how conflicts over political speech can cripple democratic hopes. Moreover, it shows how the effects of conflicts over political speech, not to mention their suppression, give us reason to pause in our endorsement of deliberative theories.

One could object to this line of argument by claiming that the example of the Portuguese Assembly is stilted because it involves the adoption of a highly standardized, very formalistic model of parliamentary procedure. Yet, it was not anything inherent to Robert's Rules that led the "Officeholders" to reject them. The conflict over Robert's Rules is emblematic of an even deeper division among the members of the Assembly. The fundamental disagreement concerns the role of the assembly, the cultural identities of office holders and politicians, and the nature of public and intercultural debate in the assembly. Robert's Rules are not inherently discriminatory; if all parties agree to their use, and have equal adeptness, skill and knowledge about their use, they can be applied in a fair and neutral manner. The "Officeholders" rejected Robert's Rules because they were forced to abandon the ways of speaking that constituted their political and cultural identities.

We propose that the deliberative model is not actually a "one system fits all" model and that it gives some group members advantage over others. Presuming a universal value to be inherent in one model of public decision making overlooks the existence of multiple group norms and multivocality within each group; in the same way, such a presumption misrepresents and oversimplifies the process of negotiating group identities, relationships and resources. Although discourse itself is marked by an irreducible plurality, and our forms of talk are as pluralistic as the commitments we hold, it still is the foundation for a radical democratic politics. If participating in political debate comes at the price of giving up the form of life that members wish to assert and protect, then public political participation is simply too costly. Yet, to give up our faith in deliberation – in other words, our faith that disagreement can be settled in democratic, and potentially non-violent ways – is also too costly, for without full and equal participation in a culturally

diverse public dialogue of all citizens, the hope for a radical democracy is sure to perish.

The challenge, then, is to look to our conversational practices for some guidance in inventing and implementing dialogic methods and forums that can make good on deliberation's promise. What is needed in such contexts is a way to facilitate a means through which multiple voices may fully participate in order to coordinate their action. Such dialogue would require and become transformative in our recognition of multiple cultural voices, norms for conduct, and emerging community.

Transformative public, political dialogue

Engaging discursive plurality in intercultural dialogue

Public dialogue is always intercultural and plural to some degree. Along with Hegde (1998b) we distinguish between pluralism as an ideal social philosophy (separate and supposedly equal, "I'm OK and You're OK") and plurality, the recognition of differences and social structural hierarchies. Discursive plurality emerges when the dialogue is critical, engaged and ongoing; and, in addition, the alternatives are, as Edward Said describes, acknowledged as "real forces" (Wicke & Sprinker 1992).

Moving beyond Buber (1972) who features mutual and positive intentions for each other and the relationship in his approach to dyadic dialogue, we define intercultural dialogue as a process in which each of the participant individuals speaks both as an individual *and* as a group that is identified in institutional and historical contexts. Intercultural dialogue is transformative in that it is an emergent and dynamic communicative form, a constituted space that is a borderland (Anzaldúa 1987), and a "third space" (Bhaba 1994). Such dialogue is a discursive accomplishment in which ideas and alternatives are engaged, diverse voices and identities speak as well as listen, reflexivity encouraged, and procedures and norms are continually deconstructed and reconstructed.

Reflexively examining implicit assumptions and privilege

Because we want to study, understand, write about, as well as facilitate the development of dialogic processes that incorporate discursive plurality and recognition of multiple cultural identities, we found it useful to begin our collaborative discussions by interrogating our assumptions about knowledge, academic inquiry, as well as praxis about this topic. We recommend a similar reflexive move for scholars and/or practitioners. Deconstructing such

“taken-for-granted” assumptions and practices reveals alternatives.

As scholars we, the authors of this paper, bring our cultural identities and all their paradoxical contradictions and tensions to the study of intercultural political discourse with all of its inherent contradictions and tensions. Our identities are also politicized and a product of multiple forms of socialization. For example, as USA authors, we recognize that institutions and ideologies in the USA teach whites to be racist, males to be sexist; by the same token, these institutions and ideologies reinforce special norms in which women of colour are marginalized and immigrants are made to feel oppression. Such ontologies shape our epistemological assumptions and methodological preferences as academicians and facilitators of dialogue.

In the same vein, we recognize that each of us brings to the study and practice of discursive plurality and public dialogue, evaluative standards of what is central and “normal”. Such standards emerge in contexts and processes of contested power and privilege. We agree with Hitchcock & Flint (1997), who argue that

Those in the center, those who occupy a dominant status such as whiteness, experience the center not so much as a consciously acknowledged status, but rather a complex of features in their social experience that have surrounded them since inception. (Hitchcock & Flint 1997: 1).

In public dialogue, the discourse of whites in the USA becomes that which is established as the standard to which all other groups should be held. According to Hitchcock and Flint (1997), this standard defines is what is normal, distinct from outsiders, what is comfortable, legitimate, obvious, not open to contradiction, and often, ordained by God.

Negative consequences occur when those of us with some degree of power and privilege fail to ask such questions as “Who am I and what privileges do I take for granted? What are my invisible standards?” (Martin 1997; Hitchcock & Flint 1997). The danger lies in reinforcing class-ism, racism, sexism, and all the other forms of elitism that silence voices and disconfirm identities, not to mention prohibit democratic deliberation.

In general, viewing discursive and cultural plurality as a resource involves asking outsiders as well as insiders to explicitly answer the following question,

What are the implicit and taken-for-granted assumptions as well as the norms for the dominant voices/group members, and who is regulated or left out? What are the results?

Such interrogations need to be built into public dialogues as ongoing processes, in order to discourage one group of individuals from setting agendas to speak for others, or from presuming that one norm or procedure

is always best.

Consequently, along with Hooks (1989), we recommend dialogue between all parties regarding the experience of exploitation, oppression, and dominance in order to identify spaces for understanding each other. We also advocate what Delgado (1994) describes as deconstruction of discourses of power as well as reflexivity in discussing the importance of being open to critiques of implicit privilege and alternative interpretations. Building such reflexive intercultural dialogue into the overall public deliberation process transforms the process; Hasian describes this as reframing

...partial visions into larger representations that are in constant need of critical interrogation, through political *intervention* rather than description or ahistorical explanation. (Hasian, in press: 8)

In order to encourage such reflexive dialogue, we specifically recommend that such processes of intercultural dialogue are monitored by intercultural teams of facilitators, and that there are explicit opportunities for participants to describe and evaluate the ongoing process

Recognizing Contradictions in Intercultural Relationships.

Creating as well as maintaining intercultural borderland spaces/moments requires redefinition and transformation of what so far have been dualistic orientations, not only in what we know about others, but also in how we go about the being and becoming (Sacks 1984) of our relationships. Relationships are characterized by contradiction, multivocality, flux and flow (Baxter & Montgomery 1996). Therefore, also in such public contexts the initiation and maintaining of relationships is an ongoing predicament, in which group representatives are constituting, through ascription and avowal, their group identities as well as their relationships with each other. Intercultural relationships are therefore negotiated in both dynamic flux and coordinated patterns.

Constant tensions and contradictions characterize relationships and groups. Baxter (1998) identifies three contradictory tensions that apply in public relationships:

- connection and autonomy,
- novelty and predictability,
- and openness and privacy.

Collier & Thompson (1997) identified several dialectic tensions in the interview discourse and open-ended survey responses of adolescent friends

in the United Kingdom. Those relevant to public dialogue include the tendency toward openness and receptivity to others, to be contrasted with a tendency toward closed-ness and privacy. A third dialectic tension is linguistic convergence/divergence, which is a tendency toward use of the high-status group's language and the contradictory tendency to diverge and use one's own primary language. Jones and Bodtger (1998) found dialectical tensions in their examination of an international collaboration and social justice project in South Africa related to degrees of belonging, engaging and speaking.

These kinds of dialectic tensions and contradictions illustrate the value of transforming dualistic, polar opposite categorizations such as true/untrue, good/bad, individual/group, centre/margin, insider/outsider to both/and possibilities in our views of intercultural dialogue. Such scholar and practitioner descriptions may minimize essentializing, and recognize hybridity. When multivocality as well as group memberships are acknowledged, descriptions of discourse are more valid and coherent with everyday discourse.

In addition, re-categorization, or the featuring of the community group as salient along with or over other group identities, can be encouraged, whenever appropriate, by describing or asking group members to articulate what their stories have in common. Making community identities salient may also offer a way of applying appreciative inquiry to celebrate what the community members can avow and perhaps collaborate to achieve (Pearce & Littlejohn 1997).

Continually re/constructing structures and norms

In this kind of dialogue, the role of discourse in constituting "truths" is recognized and therefore, multiple truths and norms for conduct are presumed. Multiple political standpoints that may change over time are acknowledged as constituent groups approach decisions and goal achievement. A flexibility of structures may best serve the democratic community, i.e., we suggest beginning with an assumption that one procedure may not fit all (and then again, it may...). What we think of as traditional norms and procedures need not be replaced with another newer norm or procedure, but questioned along with posed alternatives. Lederach (1995) calls a similar principle "recycling" and defines it as the mixing of old, used things with fresh ingredients, to recreate a new product.

Translating

When multiple cultural systems and identities are being enacted through

multiple discursive frames, various forms of translation may be necessary. Translation may be needed across languages and across the “grammars” and structures that undergird language systems (Pearce & Littlejohn 1997). For instance, concepts such as sovereignty or reconciliation mean quite different things to different groups in South Africa. In addition, the traditional may need to be translated and reconstructed into the situated, and into the present. Academics may need to translate what they do to be more relevant to practitioners and community residents. Local residents may need to translate how they are speaking as officeholders.

Co-creating New Political Rituals

Forester (1996) recommends the creation of deliberative political rituals in order to create political transformation. He makes several suggestions. The first is letting the “messiness” and details surprise and teach us. The second is to allow stories and narrative accounts to supplement rationality as sites of values and identities. Third is to encourage some transformation of relationships and identities over time, as well as to recognize that emergent issues, agendas, and goals/ends may alter ideas about what is at stake. Finally, he outlines what he calls structuring of unpredictability as a ground for learning and decision making.

As we define the goals of intercultural democratic dialogue, they include a commitment to find ways of living together in just and reasonable ways, even when differences seem irreconcilable. Cornel West describes, for example,

...solid and reliable alliances of people of colour and White progressives guided by a moral and political vision of greater democracy and individual freedom in communities, state, and transnational enterprises (Cornel West 1993: 217)

Intercultural democratically-based relationships and communities require us to embrace the plurality of discourse systems and to define the differences as potential resources rather than obstructions to the process. Transformation of our contact into borderland dialogues can occur through reflexive interrogation of privileged assumptions, uncovering alternative modes of discourse, and the willingness to reconstruct and add to the more traditional models of deliberation and advocacy.

References

- Anderson, J.A., 1996, *Communication theory: Epistemological foundations*. New York: Guilford.
Anzaldúa, G., 1987, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute.
Baxter, L., 1988, “A dialectical perspective on communication strategies in relationship

- development”, in: S. Duck, ed, *Handbook of personal relationship*, London: Wiley, pp. 257-273.
- Baxter, L. & Montgomery, B., 1996, *Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics*. New York: Guilford.
- Bhabha, H. K., 1995, “Signs taken for wonders”, in: B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, & H. Tiffin. eds., *The post-colonial studies reader*, New York: Routledge, pp. 29-35.
- Billig, M., 1995, *Banal nationalism*. London: Sage.
- Bohman, J., 1996, *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity, and Democracy*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology. .
- Bohman, J., 1995, “Public Reason and Cultural Pluralism“, *Political Theory*, 23, 253-279.
- Buber, M., 1972, *Between man and man*. New York: Macmillan.
- Collier, M. J., 1999a, “Understanding cultural identities in intercultural communication: A ten-step inventory“, in: L Samovar & R. Porter (Eds.) *Intercultural Communication: A reader* (9th ed.) Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Collier, M. J., 1999b, “Peacemaking and Intercultural Alliance Building among Middle Eastern Young Women: Keeping the Faith”, paper presented at the National Communication Association conference, Chicago, Illinois.
- Collier, M. J., 1998, “De/reconstructing the boundaries: Dialectic tensions in intercultural interpersonal alliances among Middle Eastern young women”, Paper presented at the International Communication Association conference, Jerusalem, Israel.
- Collier, M. J., 1998b, “Reconstructing our Identities as Intercultural Scholar/ Practitioners: Radical Ideas about Reflexivity and Relevance”, Paper presented at the Western States Communication Association conference, Denver, Colorado.
- Collier, M. J. & Bornman, E., 1999, “Intercultural friendships in South Africa: Norms for managing differences”, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 23: 133-156.
- Collier, M. J., & Thomas, M., 1988, “Identity in intercultural communication: An interpretive perspective”, in: Y. Kim & W. Gudykunst, eds., *Theories of intercultural communication. International and Intercultural Communication Annual, XII*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 99-120.
- Collier, M. J., & Thompson, J., 1997, “Adaptation among Adolescent Friends: Contextual Cultural Identity Co-Construction”. Paper presented at the International Conference of Language and Social Psychology. Ottawa, Canada.
- Deetz, S., 1996, “Describing differences in approaches to organization science: Rethinking Burrell and Morgan and their legacy”, *Organization Science*, 7: 191-207.
- Deetz, S., 1994, “The future of the discipline: The challenges, the research and the social contribution”, in: S. Deetz, ed., *Communication yearbook 17*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 115-147.
- Delgado, F. P., 1994, “The complexity of Mexican American identity: A reply to Hecht, Sedano and Ribeau and Mirande and Tanno”, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 18: 77-84.
- Dryzek, J., 1990, *Discursive democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Forester, J., 1996, “Beyond dialogue to transformative learning: How deliberative rituals encourage political judgment in community planning processes”, *Poznan Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities*, 46: 295-333.
- Foucault, M., 1980, *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977*. (C. Gordon, L. Marshall, J. Mepham, & K. Soper, Trans.) New York: Pantheon Books.
- Giddens, A., 1984, *The constitution of society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Giles, H., 1980, “Accommodation theory: Some new directions”, in: S. de Silva, ed., *Aspects of Linguistic Behavior*, New York: University of York.
- Gutmann, A & D. Thompson, 1996, *Democracy and disagreement*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hasian, M., in press, “When rhetorical theory and practice encounters postcolonialism:

- Rethinking the meaning of Farrakhan and the Million Man March address”, in: M. J. Collier, ed., *Constituting cultural difference through discourse. International and Intercultural Communication Annual*, 23, Newbury Park: Sage.
- Hecht, M. L., Collier, M. J., & Ribeau, S., 1993, *African American communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hegde, R., 1998a, “Translated enactments: The relational configurations of the Asian Indian immigrant experience”, in: J. Martin, T. Nakayama and L. Flores, eds., *Readings in cultural contexts*, Mountain view, CA: Mayfield, pp. 315-321.
- Hegde, R., 1998b, “View from elsewhere: Locating difference and the politics of representation from a transnational feminist perspective”, *Communication Theory*, 8.
- Hitchcock, J. & Flint, C., 1997, *The WHITENESS PAPERS*, No. 1. Roselle, NJ: Center for the Study of White American Culture, Inc.
- Hooks, B., 1989, *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking Black*. Boston: South End.
- Jenkins, R., 1997, *Rethinking ethnicity, arguments and explorations*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Jones, T. & Bodtker, A., 1998, “A dialectical analysis of a social justice process: International collaboration in South Africa”, *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 26: 357-373.
- Lederach, J. P., 1995, *Preparing for peace: Conflict transformation across cultures*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Martin, J., 1997, “Understanding whiteness in the United States”, in: L. Samovar & R. Porter, eds., *Intercultural communication: A reader*, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, pp. 54-62.
- McClintock, A., 1995, *Imperial leather*. New York: Routledge.
- McPhail, M., 1997, *Zen and the art of Rhetoric*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Morgan, R., 1996, Introduction. *Sisterhood is global*. New York: The Feminist Press.
- Pearce, W. B. & Littlejohn, S. W., 1997, *Moral conflict, when social worlds collide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rawls, J., 1993, *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Readings, B., 1991, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics*. New York: Routledge.
- Reed, R. R., 1990, “Are Robert’s Rules of Order Counterrevolutionary?: Rhetoric and the Reconstruction of Portuguese Politics”, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 63: 134-144.
- Sacks, H., 1984, “On doing ‘being ordinary’.” in J. M. Atkinson & J. Heritage, eds., *Structures of social action*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 413-429.
- Shotter, J., 1993, *Conversational realities: Constructing life through language*. London: Sage.
- Stewart, J., 1995, *Language as articulate contact*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Tajfel, H., 1978, “Interindividual and intergroup behaviour”, in: H. Tajfel (ed.), *Differentiation between social groups*, London: Academic Press, pp. 27-60.
- Tajfel H. & Turner, J. C., 1979, “An integrative theory of intergroup conflict”, in: W. G. Austin & S. Worchel, eds., *The social psychology of intergroup relations*, Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, pp. 33-47.
- Tannen, D., 1998, *The argument culture*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Tully, J., 1995, *Strange multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an age of diversity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- van Dijk, T., 1987, *Communicating racism: Ethnic prejudice in thought and talk*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- van Dijk, T., 1993, *Discourse and elite racism*. London: Routledge.
- West, C., 1993, “The new cultural politics of difference”, in: S. Daring, ed., *The cultural studies reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 203-217.
- Wicke, J. & Sprinker, M., 1992, “Interview with Edward Said”, in: M. Sprinker, ed., *Edward Said: A critical reader*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, pp. 221-264.
- Young, I.M., 1996, “Communication and the other: Beyond deliberative democracy”, in: S. Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and difference: Contesting the boundaries of the political*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 120-136.