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**NAMECALLING:  
MULTICULTURALISM AS THE IDEOLOGICAL (RULING)  
APPARATUS OF THE CANADIAN STATE \***

**Summary**

The discourse of multiculturalism supplies a brilliant conceptual and cultural technology for converting the fundamental social relations of inequality and power into categories of cultural difference and diversity. This article explores, critically, the composite discourse of multiculturalism and diversity from a feminist anti-racist perspective. It intends a critique of Canadian multiculturalism as a naming and controlling device for 'political violence and security establishment'. Some basic issues are considered: 1) the discourse and practices of multiculturalism as state ideology, and connected to that the idea of national identity and citizenship and related governing practices; 2) the formation of a state apparatus consisting of administrative categories connected to groups designated as 'ethnic', i.e., non-Europeans, and their emergence as 'minorities'; 3) the fact that current multicultural discourse of the state and popularized among Canadians both mutates into and solidifies the equation between an orientalist and racialized idea of culture/ethnicity and of religion.

**Key Words:** multiculturalism, state ideology, namecalling, racialization, "hijab question"

Although there are claims to project multiculturalism as a phenomenon of popular expression and representation, we cannot take these claims at their face value. As I pointed out in *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Racism* (2000), we need to distinguish between spontaneous popular cultures and a state ini-

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tiated cultural enterprise. If we at all wish to use the term 'multiculturalism', the first type could be called 'multiculturalism from below', and the other 'multiculturalism from above'.

Much scholarly and activist work has attended to the official nature and location of multiculturalism, its service for the project of Canadian nation building. A particularly interesting recent example of this has been Sunera Thobani's *Exalted subjects: studies in the making of race and nation in Canada* (2007), and an earlier book by Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural politics and national identity in Canada* (2002). We know that there are entire state bureaucracies dedicated to policies and practices of multiculturalism, to the extent of appointing a secretary of state for multiculturalism and Canadian identity. Canadian citizenship issues are also associated with it. The growth of multicultural discourse and administration have been incremental since the 1970s. We have seen an important role played by multiculturalism in the provincial and federal elections, where appeals to ethnicity are frequent. The continuing debates in Quebec both at the levels of the state and civil society also should leave no one in doubt about multiculturalism as a powerful ideological category in political agreement or disagreement between the different claimants to nationhood. The position papers, points of departure, for various conferences on this topic provide us further proof of the official nature and status of multiculturalism. Since September 11, 2001 they directly point to multiculturalism as a naming and controlling device for 'political violence and security establishment'. Sherene Razack's *Casting Out: The eviction of Muslims from western law and politics* (2008) shows us how ideological assumptions regarding non-Christian, especially Islamic, religious belief play a vital role in the functioning of the Canadian state in the name of national security or in managing immigrant societies. Racialized ethnic naming of non-European cultural/ethnic groups constantly produces the multicultural agenda.

Some basic issues need our consideration immediately: 1) the discourse and practices of multiculturalism as state ideology, and connected to that the idea of national identity and citizenship and related governing practices; 2) the formation of a state apparatus consisting of administrative categories connected to groups designated as 'ethnic', i.e., non-Europeans, and their emergence as 'minorities'; 3) the fact that current multicultural discourse of the state and popularized among Canadians both mutates into and solidifies the equation between an orientalist and racialized idea of culture/ethnicity and of religion. In the context of September 11, 2001, for example, this has produced a racialized religious category called 'muslim' loaded with moral and cultural connotations and condemnations. This ethno-religious subject-object is a target category developed on the terrain of previous developments in official multiculturalism. It aids a defining, surveillance device connected to punitive state actions.

Consideration of topics outlined above has created investigations into the recent turn to questioning and doctoring multiculturalism, and this signifies a crisis of national identity, governing practices of the Canadian state and society. Various studies of the Canadian state, laws, labour and citizenship have been put forward by many scholars and critics, such as Sherene Razack, Nandita Sharma, Sedef Koc and Sunera Thobani, among others. They identified (and my research supports) that official multiculturalism from its very inception functions as a device of social management and a device both for creating and sustaining a hierarchy in Canadian citizenship. This hierarchy was obviously not a new development, nor the ethnic component in it and the new multicultural projection built on old legal and social practices. Multiculturalism offered a conscious and unconscious way of holding on to the status quo. The complex and contradictory political space of a white settler colony changing (for many reasons) into a liberal democracy, with a demographic dependence on already racialized old and new immigrants from former colonies, along with an in-built anglo-french national rivalry, created an intensely volatile situation for contestations and conflicts. Under these circumstances, liberal democratic claims of the state seemed unconvincing. For historical reasons the state could neither provide a universal citizenship for all subjects nor seemed willing to do so. In this situation the idea of multiculturalism, not invented to deal with the immigrant question originally, emerged as a solution - to create hierarchies in citizenship as well as put a cultural spin to Quebec's national claims. At all levels – political, economic and cultural – multiculturalism highlighted various forms of difference and justified such differences inflected by ethnicity/race and nationality as grounds for differential entitlements. The discourse of multiculturalism wove a border of otherness around the core of 'Canadian' national identity. Eva Mackey's *House of Difference*, Thobani's 'others' of the exalted subject, and Razack's outcasts of the state all signal to this phenomenon in different ways.

But our criticism of multiculturalism and the Canadian state should not stay just at the level of the particular, the unique phenomenon which appeared in Canada. We can detect in Canada's situation a foundational aspect of the contradiction of the liberal/bourgeois state, and the specific problems of legacies of colonialism and slavery. To begin with, all bourgeois states or liberal democracies have had to separate the polity from the economy. They had to create a separate sphere of polity, a sphere of formal equality between their subjects as individuals, because the actuality of social relations of power and property informing the state and the society has to be left unaddressed. These unequal relations of a complexly constructed class society and state, however, contain the state's integral support for capital both nationally and globally. These imperatives constantly influence the definitions and prerogatives of citizenship. State and civil society relations thus, as Antonio Gramsci (1972) noted long ago in

his comments in *The Prison Notebooks*, are ones of constant contestation and adjustments. Marx (1985) in *The Communist Manifesto* spoke of this phenomenon in terms of “open and hidden struggles” of class. In the case of Canada multiculturalism is a ‘hidden’ form of class struggle in favour of the bourgeois state and its national ideology.

If the state does not at all times control the definition and extent of citizenship, and the power of conferring political subjectivity and agency are absent in or denied to it, it ceases to be the state by definition. The state is, therefore, a structural/institutional and constantly reproducing formation and set of ruling relations which manage and hold in place the unstable space of the civil society threatening-to-tear apart. Failing to do so overwhelms the dominant status of bourgeois rule. In this state of affairs the discourse of multiculturalism supplies a brilliant conceptual and cultural technology for converting the fundamental social relations of inequality and power into categories of cultural difference and diversity. It provides a non-coercive, consensual device for creating categories of differentiated subjects-citizens on the conveniently nebulous ground of culture. The very diversity and amorphousness of culture both in terms of concepts and practices provides the necessary elasticity to create peripheral political spaces which extend and buttress, in the case of Canada, the status-quo of a racialized and patriarchal political subject and agent and of the capitalist state.

Official multiculturalism thus provides an extended hegemonic apparatus of the state beyond the conventional definition of the ‘political’. This hegemonic sphere and its ‘organic intellectuals’ include rightwing think tanks, interested academics, community groups and agencies, as well as civil servants and community leaders who can all be drawn upon to confer on the state the prerogative of defining and naming its subjects and citizens. This name by which the subject is called has great interpellating and activating value. It is through this ‘namecalling’ that subjects of a state become agents or players in the established political field. The right to name is thus a rare and great power – one need only remember that god in the bible was the primary, original name giver. This expressed his sovereignty in relation to the first man and woman. This parable of naming as power also confronts us with the fact that those who name can also change the name. Jewish citizenship in Germany underwent this change with terrible consequences, and the same point is also illustrated in literature. Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* displays Prospero’s power over the natives as he names them and also ‘discovers’ the flora and the fauna of the ‘new world’. Anti-imperialist writers, such as Aimé Césaire of Martinique, note how Prospero, the European colonizer, can magically activate the ‘beings’ of his economic new world subjects, Caliban, the rebellious slave, and Ariel, the complicit one. To challenge this right and relation of naming, Césaire wrote *A Tempest: adaptation for a Black theatre* in the context of African liberation whose hero is Caliban.

This literary analogy is meant to reveal the same process still in action from the time of colonial capitalism to now – the era of liberal democracy. The content of this naming and thus calling into active ‘being’ the state’s hierarchy of subjects, annexing individuals and groups to the project of ruling, creating others and selves, itself has a political name – what Gramsci termed hegemony. Since in the context of our modern states the hegemon/the sovereign is not a single subject but a ramified ruling apparatus, multiculturalism can further elaborate that ramification. In other contexts there are other devices, nor are they or even multiculturalism a matter of conspiracy. Since all bourgeois democratic states as ruling apparatuses need legitimacy and a dimension of consensus, as well as content for assigning inclusion and exclusion within the nation’s political space, multiculturalism provides that ground. It builds legitimacy by appealing to non-partisanship on the part of the state. And this legitimacy can only happen by annexing, drawing into the state’s formation the realm of the living grounds of civil society. It is only through the penetration and re-arrangement of civil society, the realm of our everyday norms and forms, influencing it morally and ideologically - that the state gains its ‘democratic’ as opposed to coercive hegemony.

Louis Althusser’s astute reading of the state as an ideological apparatus rooted in repression also provides us a way to expand on understanding Gramsci’s concept of hegemony in concrete details. The core of the state for Althusser rests on ideology, which expresses itself as a device for naming – it involves a calling into ‘being’ through being named by the ideological apparatus of the state. This is the process that he calls interpellation. One is called by a certain name by the state, he says, one responds, and is interpellated. The citizen, as such, is ‘always already’ a subject citizen of the state. It is obvious that multiculturalism is an important innovation in this direction of naming and hailing. Thus, creating official, standardized interpretations and categories of culture, and implanting them within the state is a brilliant ruling strategy. If the non-Europeans, the ‘minorities’ or ‘ethnics’ are to have an agency in the state’s space at all, it must be through multiculturalism’s ideological naming or categorical constellation – its incorporative function. Thus we can understand why multiculturalism may appear to many, who are not critical or oppositional to bourgeois democracy, as a positive phenomenon which confers on socially subordinated groups an expressive, active agentic moment.

This interpellative subject-agent formation, as the reproductive mechanism of the state, is paralleled by Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer in *The Great Arch* (1985), where they speak of the state as a cultural revolution. The liberal state, they say, reconstructs popular culture into an official one, and out of this process forms a cultural ruling device which serves as a moral regulator for the society at large. Thus a bourgeois Euro-Christian racist and patriarchal discourse elaborating the state may

ethnicize and communalize peoples of colour, and a woman of muslim background is conferred through this device her agentic difference as subordination to both her male counterpart and the state. As a naming and practical ruling device multiculturalism serves to measure 'difference' as difference from the core national identity which is christian-European, and under the guise of liberality, or plurality, provides the bourgeois state with both hegemony and a mask that disguises the inherent inequality.

The multicultural citizen will deny her designated status at the peril of having no mainstream, established political space. Funded community agencies experience and display this in their survival and participatory tactics. If some social groups are othered or marked as ethnic minorities, and ethnicity/culture has come to be equated with religion, such citizen-subjects often project and abide by religious identities as their basic identities. It is not a surprise that mainstream newspaper op ed pages or television interviews and talk shows are full of such docile, islamized apologists – they are quickly selected by non-ethnicized 'Canadians' as representative of 'others'. This telos of religion is also spatialized in mosques, temples, gurudwaras, and 'community' practices of controlling ethnicized/religiocized gendered bodies, especially of women. Needless to say, the multicultural discourse which puts religion at the centre has strengthened the position of self-styled community leaders and patriarchal families who are empowered as real representatives and guardians of women and children. Dominating within religiocized communities, and in the narrow space of the family, these multicultural leaders and male family heads supply what the ideological apparatus of the state expects of them – the performance of religion from Samuel Huntington's dictionary of 'civilization'. This behavior then further marginalizes them and drives them out of the pale of regular modes of citizenship.

### *THE GREAT HIJAB QUESTION*

In the middle ages Europeans pondered over how many angels could stand on the head of a pin. Of late many Western polities seem to be hanging by a piece of cloth on a woman's head. What could create such a potent symbology out of a fairly mundane and generally ongoing practice? Why are new head/face coverings emerging steadily and why are western governments wasting parliamentary time by engaging in a behaviour of castigation not seen since the demise of the crusades and the inquisition? Hijab is "the" social question in French schools, London buses and Quebec and Swiss elections. White middle class, middle aged male TV personalities feel threatened by these "faceless" figures. Fear, anxiety, contempt and even hatred thicken the social atmosphere the moment the issue is mentioned or a street is seen with covered women. The same French colonial urgency that Frantz Fanon (1967) spoke of in "Unveiling Algeria" has violently resurfaced since September 11, 2001. What

could have diminished the liberal delight in promoting diversity, the state's vaunted citizen's rights to freedom of expression, etc., now discussed as a burden for restraining ethnic/religious others? J.S. Mill in his essay on "Civil Liberty" told us that freedom of expression, speech and association are promised rights of citizens unless they 'harm' our neighbours. Whom does the hijab harm?

This question cannot be answered without a short historical overview of what led to a crisis of democracy such as the present one, in which the Charter of Rights and Freedoms can be trumped by executive acts of the state which suspend all rights provisions for all members of the society, but are in practice targeted at those considered 'dangerous foreigners' invading the nation's space.

As pointed out by legal scholars, such as Constance Backhouse (1999) and Sherene Razack (2002, 2008), the formation of the Canadian state relied heavily on racialized difference and social legislation encoding this. The initial stage of the state formation was an openly segregative one, later to be followed by a call for assimilation. This assimilation was restricted among Europeans and then extended to others since the 1970s. But the racialized relations, the existing racist culture and commonsense, along with a poorly urbanized and an intensely provincial society, made assimilation an elusive goal for non-Europeans. The fact that assimilation cannot be mandated or foreshortened or even formed without long historical coexistence outside of spheres of domination, such as colonialism, slavery and menialized migrant labour, seemed to have escaped notice of the propagators and promoters of official multiculturalism. What should have been a two-way street involving settlers and others was by definition one-way and a dead end.

Yet for Canada immigration was necessary, for labour and other demographic imperatives, for the 'two nation' national question to be culturalized, to prevent separation and for the first nations to be denied control in land and self-governing. In this political and historical juncture the presence of non-European others led to the discourse of ethnic plurality and cultural diversity as no common ground for national unity could be found. But any cultural discourse, especially of the state, was always already racialized in this semi-colonial semi-bourgeois state and society. So an official multiculturalism could not be developed as anything other than a hegemonic strategy. It was never meant to yield, in fact could not, an equal co-existence of cultures and peoples. "Difference" continued to be threatening, at best "tolerated" with much self-congratulatory fanfare on the part of the "exalted subjects" when posed by non-European others. The media often spoke and speaks of "too much diversity" and the indigestible, inassimilable nature of the "immigrant" cultures, leaving the onus of assimilation to them. Though multiculturalism saved Canada's face internationally and in the United Nations and even became its national selling

point, those marked as multicultural citizens, as defined away from ‘Canadians’, continued as negatively racialized subject-citizens.

This troubled state of affairs has hit a rock bottom in this era of “terror” and “security”. Now the multicultural citizen-subjects inspire not only fears of population explosion and lowering of educational standards (wholly erroneously), but have become walking human bombs – the home grown terrorists. This comprises both men and women. Now in the twenty-first century multiculturalism has become a liability, and all over the West it has become politically correct not to be multicultural, and often to regret the moment it was used earlier as a hegemonic device. Now elections can be won by posters showing one black sheep being kicked out by three white ones, as in Switzerland recently, or by ultra-right parties, such as the British National Party, to represent Britain in the European Commission. Instrumentalization of “terror” and security has bent multiculturalism into modes of racial profiling, surveillance, trips to Guantanamo and threats of deportation. The “muslim” as a category of terror is a mutated version of the ‘dangerous alien’ of earlier times. Concentration camps, internments, barracks of old, no-fly lists, all provide the institutional and ideological underpinnings for the current culture of surveillance and functioning of the state. Already existing, though partially suppressed, constellations of hatreds and anxieties dating from paranoia of colonial and slavery days and perhaps even of the days of the crusades are now reawakened with vengeance by the state and the mainstream media. These are the old “white” lies and the nation’s others have to take cover. Airports have become abysses which swallow the marked others, border controls are at the borders of society, not just at the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel.

This background may help us to see why a piece of cloth on a woman’s head and face can strike fear in the hearts of adult white men in civil service or talk-show hosts. These are the female counterparts of the male terrorists. What are they hiding in the folds of their burkhas? Whose face is hiding under the black cover? But such is the nature of multicultural/racist discourse that it always holds in a single cultural constellation contradictory stereotypes. The woman’s same veil symbolizes not just islamic terror, but also islam’s barbarism towards women. It inspires both “security”, atrocities and frenzies of ‘white’ or civilizational rescue – Bush wages a ‘feminist war’ against the Taliban with Cheri Blair and Condoleeza Rice at his side. The so-called American victory is signalled by the image of a single Afghan woman surrounded only by men in a street in Kandahar lifting up a blue veil at the command of western media. The sign of freedom come.

But we must conclude our observations by shifting our gaze inward – from “them” to “us” – the ‘ethnic’ subjects of the state’s ideological interpellation, to our own commitment to capitalism, to upward mobility by any means necessary. In varying ways the subject-citizens share

class, gender and racialized world views of the “real citizen”. They have learnt them before in the former colonies, and have further internalized them upon ‘landing’ here. The othering definitions have been internalized and sought by the ethnic subject to be put to profit. The case in point is the current window of opportunity seized by so-called community figures to put religion at the service of male domination, and accruing of political power of a second hand sort. Furthermore, peoples terrorized under the name “muslim”, as in the case of jews after the holocaust, have responded by embracing the name as a gesture of resistance. The multicultural subject-citizen is not exempt from being a party to social relations of property, patriarchal morality and other power relations. In this they are not just victims, but also complicit to the subjections of ‘others’ in their own world. As such they are neither inferior nor superior to the “exalted subject”, the citizen-citizen who represents the national identity.

### CONCLUSION

Multiculturalism is but a moment in the long process of segregation, isolation, political and social disenfranchisement, dating from the foundation of this white settler colony at the behest of the world market. To be racially culturalized, essentially religiocized to attain a distorted and limited agency, may seem like a gain. But now this agency has turned on its head. This has led to a totalizing religious identity for some of the multicultural social groups which impels their aggression inward into mini-nationalist fundamentalism. Destructive gestures, in this context, may be glorified – it is immaterial whether they are coerced or volunteered. Women born into muslim communities face poor choices. They can wear a veil as a gesture of defiance, with all its patriarchal connotations, they may be made to wear one, or refuse at the risk of being branded as “disloyal”, even as “traitors” to a persecuted people, or lauded by the state of terror and security as being truly progressive and used, for example as Irshad Manji<sup>1</sup>, as their poster girl.

But such women have to understand that there are other forms of resistance, which are more extensively political, and rest on the ground of social justice. This justice calls for an overall social transformation, goes from the paradigm of the community to that of social subjectivity. The veil is a distraction – with or without it, the point is to organize a struggle against the fascistic tendencies of neoliberal states in their current democratic crisis. It is immaterial whether one is secular or a believer, this is not a religious war but one against injustice.

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<sup>1</sup> Irshad Manji, a writer and media person, author of *The trouble with Islam today*, has supported liberal white feminists in their one-dimensional criticism of islam’s oppression of women.

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### ЕТИКЕТИРАЊЕ: МУЛТИКУЛТУРАЛИЗАМ КАО ИДЕОЛОШКИ (УПРАВЉАЧКИ) АПАРАТ КАНАДСКЕ ДРЖАВЕ

#### Резиме

Дискурс мултикултурализма обезбеђује брилијантну концептуалну и културну технологију за конвертовање фундаменталних друштвених односа неједнакости и моћи у категорије разлике и различитости. У овом раду се анализира сложен дискурс мултикултурализма и различитости из феминистичке и антирасистичке перспективе. Његов циљ јесте критика канадског мултикултурализма као средства којим се етикетира и контролише због „политичког насиља и успостављања безбедности“. Разматрају се нека основна питања: 1) дискурс и пракса мултикултурализма као државне идеологије, и његова веза са идејом националног идентитета и држављанства; 2) стварање државног апарата који се састоји од административних категорија, и повезаност са групама које се означавају као „етничке“, односно „не-европске“, и њихово појављивање у виду „мањина“; 3) чињеница да се тренутни, званични дискурс мултикултурализма, који се популаризује међу Канађанима, истовремено претвара у, и још више учвршћује, изједначавање оријентализације и расизације културе/етницитета и религије.

**Кључне речи:** мултикултурализам, државна идеологија, етикетирање, расизација, „хицаб питање“.