Multiculturalism, Schooling and Muslims in Australia

From Orientalism to a possibility of hospitable education

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Introduction

Multicultural nation-states are currently faced with serious questions about the education of their citizens. One of them is the value of diversity, and of the cultural, linguistic and cognitive pluralism that differences contribute to the schooling of all students. The history of schooling in Australia, of its governance and curricular organization, has always been marked by shifting perceptions and representations of difference, depending on how its value has been conceived. When conflicts between values occur, choices about education have to be made. These are political choices between recognition and misrecognition, inclusion and exclusion, democracy and coercion, homogenization and pluralism. Whatever the choice, educational decision-making has always been justified on various political grounds, but underneath all these justifications, functions the will to power and sovereignty and a desire for a homogeneous community. The moment of decision about what kind of knowledge all students should acquire, what kind of meanings should be valued, and what kind of values should be meaningful for all in a multicultural state, is a moment of judgement that involves crisis and antagonism, as well as struggle, contestation and negotiation (Critchley, 1999). The question of politics in education is necessarily, in a Derridian sense, an *aporia* of choice that is inherent in the multiplicity of options.

Often decisions about education are deduced from a position that includes a principle or understanding of what it means to be with others and how others are perceived. That is to say, a decision is deduced from the principle of *ipseity* – a position of indivisible, unshaken and unlimited power of self-identity – from

which differences are perceived and through which a nation-state, for instance, distances itself from otherness (Naas, 2008). New and already settled migrants, in this regard, can be perceived as a threat to the sovereign power and this triggers political technologies of strengthening a sense of control, mastery and authority by the state. Education is one of these technologies that the state relies upon to control not only what all citizens need to know but also their identities and values, thereby transforming differences into sameness or positioning those who have deep-seated differences as more alien than they have been before and radicalising them.

Some while back, in the lead-up to major educational reforms, the then Treasurer Peter Costello delivered a notoriously famous speech to the Sydney Institute, attacking 'mushy multiculturalism' and forcing Muslims to honour Australian values or face the prospect of being kicked out. Costello said:

> Before entering a mosque visitors are asked to take off their shoes. This is a sign of respect. If you have a strong objection to walking in your socks don't enter the mosque. Before becoming an Australian you will be asked to subscribe to certain values. If you have strong objection to those values don't come to Australia (Costello, 2006, p. 82).

A number of political steps have been taken since that time to emphasize values education in Australian schools. Schools have been obliged to articulate their mission statements and ensure values are incorporated into school policies and teaching programs across the key learning areas. Many schools have interpreted this approach as a systematic way of teaching Australian values, reinforcing them explicitly through all areas of the curriculum by displaying posters promoting values, celebrating Australian cultural events such as Australia Day and ANZAC Day and singing the National Anthem. Other schools have put emphasis on the building of intercultural understanding and raising awareness of religious and cultural differences (see Erebus International, 2006). As a consequence, values education has been directly linked to quality teaching, with the aim of developing tolerance and social cohesion. Some examples of practices have included inter-school cooperation to reduce the potential isolation and alienation of Islamic youth, working with Islamic schools to build the acceptance of differences, inter-faith harmony and coexistence and to promote the understanding of Islam

among Australian students. Even though the aims have been justified from the point of view of recognition, the original binary logic of 'us' and 'them' as well as the consolidation of Australianness as an imaginary and unitary identity have implicitly drawn new borders of exclusion.

Reflecting on the borders of exclusion in Europe, Balibar (2004) argues that alongside the production of unitary (or unified) identities, due to globalization, migration and transnational processes, run discourses of militant nationalism and ideologies of collective security. This mobilizes communities to 'fortify' themselves and use various forms of power to protect their national, ethnic, social, religious and other borders from interior and exterior strangers who are perceived as a threat to their cohesion.

Similarly, the difficulties faced by many Muslim people today in Australia can be understood in the context of unitary national narratives of privilege and exclusion as they are told through public policies that engage with cultural diversity. By inscribing the terms of presence of 'others' and the nature of their relations with the host nation in policies, legitimacy has been unwittingly given to discourses that undermine efforts to achieve democratization of citizenship, equality and social justice. Policies of immigration and multiculturalism have been focused on managing different others who reside in Australia or who are intent on settling here. Discourses, emanating from them, have been fraught with confusion, misunderstanding and omissions that have had profound effects on how people are (mis)recognized and how their right to maintenance of cultural identity is imagined.

A particular feature of Australia's engagement with others is that particular groups have been perceived as more threatening and judged more harshly than other groups. This means that some groups are scrutinized more than others and the impact of scrutiny and judgement have profound effects on personal well-being, in general, and on Australian Muslim students, more specifically, as they are 'considered to be among the most deprived groups' (Pe-Pua et al, 2010:23).

This chapter explores the inscription and legitimization of exclusion in the national imagination and considers the impacts of exclusion on the nation's responsiveness to multiculturalism and enactments of multicultural teaching practice, in particular with the reference to Muslim students. It traces how ethical perspectives, characteristic of early articulations of multiculturalism,

became consumed by a strategic management agenda. This had the effect of limiting what could be possible in classrooms, thereby alienating many culturally and linguistically diverse students from learning. The authors propose injecting an ethical dimension into how teachers relate to culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Narratives of exclusion in the national imagination

Political fortifications grounded at the time of European settlement and later inscribed in law through the impost of the White Australia Policy (1902-73) continue to permeate the practice of everyday life. Today many students from Muslim backgrounds are subjected to both verbal and physical abuse, assaults on identity and self worth and structural exclusion (Mansouri & Trembath, 2005). Markers of identity and cultural practices are scrutinized and fiercely debated and many institutions have not been able to respond effectively to racism directed towards Muslim students.

This inhospitality can be understood in the context of political interventions into immigration and multiculturalism that have sought to control the terms of presence, and the nature of our relations with others. The consequences are that the practice of managing explicitly different others, through oppression, has become a part of the nation's narrative of exclusion. Today these sentiments, with respect to Muslims, are reproduced when people assert that 'they should leave their ways behind ... they should become like us' (Dunn, 2009:38).

Those strangers who fail to become culturally and linguistically invisible confront the prejudicial discourses of history: 'Come out here takin' jobs an' think yer own the joint'... 'Why don't yer go back ter yer own bloody country' (Culotta, 1957:52). Historically embedded practices such as these are at odds with Modood's contention that 'equality is not having to hide or apologize for one's origins, family or community but expecting others to respect them and adapt public attitudes and arrangements so that the heritage they represent is encouraged rather than contemptuously expected to wither away' (1997:358).

Multiculturalism has offered a way to explore what it means to be with others. Central to the shifting perspectives of Australia's multiculturalism has been recognition of cultural diversity. This ideal, however, brought with it contradictory expectations. Many people expected others to integrate but

would, in Modood's estimation, tolerate 'difference in the private sphere' (1997:358). Other people, however, expected that the right to recognition and respect would be upheld universally. These differing assumptions brought with them untold misunderstandings about what would be recognized, what would be challenged, what could be accommodated and respected, and ultimately, what would be denied. When the state situated the right to the maintenance of culture within an ideal of unity, the potential of multiculturalism to shape ethical relations with others was consumed by a strategic management agenda.

Although multicultural education policies had the effect of advancing support to schools, schools remained centres for the maintenance of monoculturalism. Demands for English-only classrooms denied other languages and the right to maintenance of cultural identity was circumvented. Primacy was rightly assigned to provisions for English language learning. But English only was privileged, at the expense of other languages, cultural knowledge and ways of organising and proceeding with learning. There were few adjustments to curriculum, and practice continued to favour existing institutional and learning arrangements that would hasten integration and support social cohesion. Recognition was routinely reduced to celebrations of exotic aspects of cultures that often took place in the absence of the very communities that were being represented, reducing others and their cultures to narrow sketches of something that others imagined them to be.

A mood of indifference reminiscent of Heidegger's *Fürsorge* (2005) became unsettled. Many people 'leapt in', intent on taking over what others were doing. Public demonstrations in Camden, NSW, were held to stop the construction of an Islamic school, the hijab was defined as a symbol of domination, 'drunken mobs' draped with Aussie flags claimed Cronulla Beach casting out 'dirty dog lebs' (McIlveen & Jones, 2005) and the then Prime Minister Howard's promotion of a shared national identity, grounded in core values and the constitution of an Australian way of life, was designed to fortify the nation.

What was missing in practice was the relationality that begins with recognition and respect and implies reciprocity. Furthermore, by focusing acutely on the achievement of social cohesion, the state unwittingly robbed

people of their right to enter into respectful and robust debate on issues of national significance, which is the foundation of democratic governance. This has the effect of diluting aspirations for agency in schools and other institutions.

The federal government had affirmed the nation's commitment to a shared sense of nationhood, but one that is situated within the ideals of mutual respect and fairness (Australian Multicultural Advisory Council, 2010). Building an authentic shared sense of nationhood relies on significant adjustments to the ways we 'deal with people on the basis of respect, a recognition of what people are, of their history and of their culture' (Fraser, 2012). This implies acknowledging Orientalism, in policy and practice, and enabling respectful cross-cultural engagements, reasserting the importance of ethical intercultural relations and privileging ethical conceptions of citizenship. This would mean that assaults on self-worth and a sense of belonging (see Parekh, 2004; Taylor, 1997) are not the central features of political interventions that have electoral appeal. Education has a significant role to play in levelling the playing field.

The limits to success of multicultural education are situated in misperceptions about how to recognize, respect and respond to students. When the lived experiences of students and their socio-cultural resources are ignored and actively silenced, recognition is reduced to knowing *about*.

Ethical practice is dangerously compromized when schools set about, often with the best of intentions, to celebrate exotic elements of culture and teaching the cultural mores of representative groups from an insular position. Indeed, Kostogriz et al (2011) argue that a discourse of 'partial or selective recognition … has proven to be as exclusionary as everything it supposedly exceeded' (p. 3). As a result, teaching practice routinely proceeds with minimal adjustments to existing arrangements. The Victorian government (2008) acknowledges the 'challenges in meeting the needs of its culturally and linguistically diverse students' (p. 20). Yet, in practice, it is assumed that these students have a suite of deficits rather than a bank of socio-cultural resources at their disposal. Thus, support is directed to teaching skills that might hasten integration rather than dealing with curriculum deficits and exclusive practice.

An alternative view, proposed by Parekh (2004), is that the struggle for social

justice begins with a clearer understanding of the significance of recognition of identity and this 'depends on dialogical relations with others' (Taylor, 1997:80). This suggests that if there were sustained ethical relations between members of the school community, a condition promoted by the Islamic community, schools could distance themselves from add-on programs and celebrations of exotic aspects of culture as illuminations of recognition. It is this relational aspect of teaching and learning that provides the landscape for challenging exclusion and hierarchies of power and privilege and discourses.

Towards a hospitable teaching practice

The idea of hospitable education has been currently developed to mitigate exclusion, relations of power and alienation of culturally, linguistically and religiously different students in Australian schools (Kostogriz, 2009, 2011). The notion of hospitality compels educators to ask the question of difference in a particular way: how can these students be responded to respectfully and ethically so that they draw on their cultural resources in the classroom?

First and foremost, for teachers this means appropriating a place for themselves from which they can welcome the other. This also means making a shift from the centeredness on the culturally dominant ways of seeing the world and other people that is imbedded in the curriculum to seeing this knowledge relationally or dialogically with others. Such a shift implies a transposition of one's teaching into the field of ethics.

The idea of hospitable education obliges teachers to think not only about what it means to welcome students who are others but also what it means to accept their identities, values, texts, knowledges and meanings into the learning environment. This is a challenging pedagogical project as it demands the teacher move away from the idea of managing differences though the regulation and validation of learning processes and rather approach the teacher's role as a matter of responsibility – that is, as a matter of being able to respond to what culturally different students bring to the classroom and to the learning event. It is only then the issue of hospitable education has relevance for teaching in multicultural classrooms.

Multiculturalism, as we have demonstrated above, has been a decisive shift away from the repressive, restrictive and xenophobic inhospitality of

national identity and education unified around the concept 'white Australia' to a society and education governed by principles of cultural coexistence and intercultural awareness. As such, multiculturalism is the realization of how one can live and learn with others. But it is not the renunciation of one's mastery and, in turn, is not the realization of hospitality and justice.

One can mention again in this regard such events as the Cronulla riots, the Australian system of detention camps for asylum seekers, current Islamophobia and, related to this, reinforcement of the security state, border protection and the struggle to stop the boats that are arriving from Indonesia. All this can be seen as a retreat from the egalitarian model of multicultural society. Justice in multicultural conditions, if there is such thing (Derrida, 1999), is yet to come and, in many ways, this depends on how we perceive and practise hospitality. Similarly, a just education depends on how we perceive the meaning of hospitality in Australian classroom. Could an ethics of hospitality in education provide the foundations of just education and expel cultural-semiotic violence in relation to Muslim, and other students?

For education to be hospitable and welcoming to the other, it needs to be extended without the imposition of any condition for culturally different students to assimilate. This requires a radical openness and response-ability to the other, for hospitality implies that the other be welcomed as a human being, not as a stereotyped other. This poses a challenge to how one can recognize differences among human beings in a system of schooling that is configured to marginalize and exclude, discipline and punish, homogenize and normalize. Hospitable education entails a restructuring of one's practice and creating possibilities in such a system. It is probably at this point that we need to make a distinction between pedagogical practice (i.e., teaching the other) and ethics (i.e., response-ability to the other). In doing so, we need to argue the primacy of the ethical in teaching. It is only then we can say that being hospitable to and responsible for the other is the very possibility of justice in and through pedagogical practice.

In transforming cultural-linguistic monologism of education, dialogical ethics as a reciprocal hospitality is particularly powerful for it addresses the very act of annihilating the other as an ethical impossibility. Dialogue with the other involves a reversal of the meaning of teaching and learning whereby a

teacher is welcomed by those she or he welcomes. This means a radical trans-
formation of the predominate mode of teaching culturally diverse students
that often involves one-directional transmission of knowledge by the teacher
and its appropriation by these students. The dialogue of recognized differ-
ences destabilizes not only the idea of dominant knowledge and meanings but
also the very sense of their ownership. That is to say, hospitable education can
potentially dismantle the notion of culturally dominant knowledge because it
starts with the welcoming of others rather than with asserting one's power to
impose knowledge on them. This means that the welcoming teacher can no
longer retain its authority over meaning-making, thereby creating a space for
the 'surplus of vision' which the other provides to teaching and learning in
multicultural classrooms (Bakhtin, 1990). To welcome the Other through the
dialogical engagement in learning means, therefore, expanding the horizon of
meaning-making and intercultural understanding. In this regard, dialogical
ethics springs from recognition of the fact that the Other has a power to shape
my understanding of the world – that is, my worldview.

Hospitality injects a moral dimension into how teachers can relate to
culturally and linguistically diverse students before these relations have
become mediated by curriculum frameworks and rationalized as teaching
targets and learning outcomes. The key issue here is shifting the focus away
from the ideologically mediated ways of relating to migrant and minority
students and to the primacy of ethics in everyday classroom events, as a
responsibility for their welfare, their futures and, in turn, for the future of
the multicultural society in which they live. This is a question of shifting
away from learning how to live *side-by-side* with strangers and to learning how
to live with them *face-to-face*. Needless to say, the possibility of interrupting
the cultural, linguistic or epistemological violence towards cultural-linguistic
diversity will depend on engaging all students in dialogical learning and
restoring a sense of the agency of those others who have been excluded,
marginalized or demonized in the process of inhospitable education.

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