The New Dynamics of Identity Politics in the Americas

Multiculturalism and Beyond

Edited by
Olaf Kaltmeier, Sebastian Thies and
Josef Raab

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The New Dynamics of Identity Politics in the Americas

Multiculturalism has shaped identity politics in the Americas over the past decades, as illustrated by politics of recognition, affirmative action, and increasing numbers of internationally recognized cultural productions by members of ethnic minorities. Hinting at postcolonial legacies in political rhetoric and practice, multiculturalism has also served as a driving force behind social movements in the Americas. Nevertheless, in current academic discussions and public debates on migration, globalization and identity politics, concepts like new ethnicities, ethnic groupism, creolization, hybridity, *mestizaje*, diasporas, and "post-ethnicity" articulate positionings that are profoundly changing our understanding of "multiculturalism." Combining theoretical reflections with case studies the aim of this book is to demonstrate the current dynamics of (post-) multicultural politics in the Americas.

This book was based on a special issue of *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*.

Olaf Kaltmeier is Professor of Transnational History of the Americas and Executive Director of the Center for InterAmerican Studies at Bielefeld University.

Sebastian Thies is Professor of Iberoamerican Literature and Cultural Studies at Tübingen University.

Josef Raab is Professor of American Studies at University Duisburg-Essen and President of the International Associations of Inter-American Studies.

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Chapter 1
Multiculturalism and Beyond: The New Dynamics of Identity Politics in the Americas
Olaf Kaltmeier, Josef Raab and Sebastian Thies
Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies, volume 7, issue 2 (July 2012)
pp. 103–114

Chapter 3
Syncretism as a Form of Multicultural Politics: The Interlocation of African-Latin-American Identities in Brazil
Amos Nascimento
Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies, volume 7, issue 2 (July 2012)
pp. 115–136

Chapter 4
Paradoxes of Costa Rican Multiculturalism
Gisella Díaz-Azofeifa
Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies, volume 7, issue 2 (July 2012)
pp. 137–154

Chapter 5
Multicultural Projects in Guatemala: Identity Tensions and Everyday Ideologies
Santiago Bastos
Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies, volume 7, issue 2 (July 2012)
pp. 155–172

Chapter 6
Diversity Regimes Beyond Multiculturalism? A Reflexive Ethnography of Intercultural Higher Education in Veracruz, Mexico
Gunther Dietz
Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies, volume 7, issue 2 (July 2012)
pp. 173–200

Chapter 7
New Indigenous Citizenship in Bolivia: Challenging the Liberal Model of the State and its Subjects
Andrew Canessa
Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies, volume 7, issue 2 (July 2012) pp. 201–222

Chapter 8
Specters of Multiculturalism: Conceptualizing the Field of Identity Politics in the Americas
Olaf Kaltmeier and Sebastian Thies
Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies, volume 7, issue 2 (July 2012) pp. 223–240

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Notes on Contributors

Santiago Bastos is Professor and senior-researcher at the Center of Research and Superior Studies in Social Anthropology, CIESAS, in Guadalajara, Mexico. From 1988 to 2008 he lived and worked in Guatemala, where he studied the conformation and changes in ethnic dimension of Guatemalan society, with special attention to effects of indigenous struggles. His recent publications include *El Movimiento Maya en la Década después de la Paz* (co-authored with Roderick Leslie Brett, F&G Editores, 2010) and *Multiculturalismo y Futuro en Guatemala,* FLACSO Guatemala, 2008).

Andrew Canessa is an Anthropologist at the University of Essex and has worked with Aymara-speaking communities of Bolivia since 1989. He has published extensively on issues of gender, indigeneity, and identity in the Andes. His most recent work is on indigeneity and new models of citizenship. His recent publications include *Intimate Indigeneities: Race, Sex and History in the Small Spaces of Andean Life* (Duke University Press, 2012) and *Hacia un futuro Indígena en Mesoamérica y los Andes: Género, Complementariedades y Exclusiones* (co-authored with Aida Hernandez Castillo, Abya Yala Press & IWGIA, 2012).

Gisella Díaz-Azofeifa is an independent researcher who has been working with indigenous communities and related subjects for the last four years. She holds a Licentiate Degree in Political Sciences from the University of Costa Rica.

Gunther Dietz holds a PhD in Anthropology from Hamburg University and is a Research Professor in Intercultural Studies at Universidad Veracruzana in Xalapa, Mexico. He currently serves as Secretary General of the International Association for Intercultural Education (IAIE). He is the author of *La Comunidad Purhépecha es Nuestra Fuerza: Etnicidad, Cultura y Región en un Movimiento Indígena en Michoacán, México* (Ediciones Abya Yala, 1999) and *Multiculturalismo, Educación Intercultural y Derechos Indígenas en las Américas* (co-authored with Rosa Guadalupe Mendoza Zuany and Sergio Téllez Galván, Abya Yala Press, 2008).

Demetrius Eudell is Professor of History at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. In addition to a number of essays on the history of Blacks in the Americas and on the intellectual history of the discourse of race, he is the author of "*The Political Languages of Emancipation in the British Caribbean and the U.S. South*," and co-editor with Carolyn Allen of "*Sylvia Wynter: A Transculturalist Rethinking Modernity*," a special issue of the "*Journal of West Indian Literature*."

Olaf Kaltmeier is Junior Professor of Transnational History of the Americas and Executive Director of the Center for InterAmerican Studies at Bielefeld University, Germany. He is co-director of the BMBF-collaborative research project "The Americas as Space of Entanglements." His recent publications include *Los Andes en movimiento: Identidad y poder en el nuevo paisaje político* (co-edited with Pablo Ospina and Christian Büschges, Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Sede Ecuador, 2009) and *Selling EthniCity: Urban Cultural Politics in the Americas* (Ashgate, 2011).

Amos Nascimento studied music, social sciences, and philosophy in Argentina, Brazil, the United States, and Germany. He obtained his PhD at the University of Frankfurt. He is the author of *A Matter of Discourse: Community and Communication in Contemporary Philosophies* (Ashgate, 1998), *Brasil: Perspectivas Internacionais* (UNIMEP, 2001), *Rationalität, Ästhetik und Gemeinschaft* (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, 2003) and other essays on Afro-Brazilian studies and cultural and philosophical issues in the Americas and Europe.

Josef Raab is Professor of North American Studies at the University of Duisburg-Essen and Founding President of the International Association of Inter-American Studies. His research focuses on Inter-American Studies, North American literature and culture, television, film, ethnicity, and borders. He is co-editor of the book series *"Inter-American Studies"* and *Hybrid Americas: Contacts, Contrasts, and Confluences in New World Literatures and Cultures* (co-edited with Martin Butler, Bilingual Press, 2008), *E Pluribus Unum? National and Transnational Identities in the Americas* (co-edited with Sebastian Thies, Bilingual Press, 2009), and *Screening the Americas: Narration of Nation in Documentary Film* (co-edited with Sebastian Thies and Daniela Noll-Opitz, Bilingual Press, 2011).

Sebastian Thies is Professor of Iberoamerican Literary and Cultural Studies at Tübingen University, Germany. He has done research on Latin American literatures from the 16th to the 20th century, on literature and film in exile, on theory of documentary film, and on Inter-American Studies. His recent publications include *E Pluribus Unum? National and Transnational Identities in the Americas* (co-edited with Josef Raab, Bilingual Press, 2009), *Screening the Americas: Narration of Nation in Documentary Film* (co-edited with Josef Raab and Daniela Noll-Opitz, Bilingual Press, 2011), and *Colonialism and the Culture of Writing* (co-edited with Barbara Job and Rosa Yáñez, forthcoming).

Contents

Multiculturalism and Beyond: The New Dynamics of Identity Politics in the Americas

Olaf Kaltmeier, Josef Raab and Sebastian Thies

Multiculturalism is to this day one of the predominant modes by which western democracies address cultural heterogeneity, migration and postcolonial legacies in political rhetoric and practice. This introductional article deals with the political conjunctures of multiculturalism in the Americas from the beginning in the 1960s passing through the crisis and neo-conservative backlash in the 1990s to the contemporary post-multicultural identity politics.

Both the emergence of multiculturalism in the 1960s and its current crisis are closely related to political conjunctures in the Americas – a world region profoundly impacted by the postcolonial constitution of its societies. Although there is an evident rift in the American hemisphere between Global North and South, which manifests itself in numerous cultural, social and political antagonisms, the post-industrial and 'developing' countries of the Americas have all been shaped by the *longue durée* of colonization, racism, slavery, and social inequality. From the 1960s onward, the politics of multiculturalism have been the Americas' answer to the social problems arising from their postcolonial legacy as well as from their cultural heterogeneity resulting from mass migration to the western hemisphere. By means of the political recognition of minority rights and a limited redistribution of power and resources, social conflicts based on cultural difference were channeled into forms compatible with institutionalized politics. The success of multiculturalism in the management of social conflicts led to a worldwide conjuncture in the 1980s and 1990s, when the former political radicalism of minority rights advocacy merged with neo-liberal models of governance.

Although multiculturalism is to this day one of the predominant modes by which western democracies address cultural heterogeneity, migration and postcolonial legacies in political rhetoric and practice, a marked backlash against multiculturalism can be observed from the 1990s onward. In order to counteract multiculturalism's subversion of national hegemony, neo-conservatives have predicted a potential

'balkanization' of western nations and, particularly after 9/11, the threat of a 'clash of civilizations' with the Islamic world. For the left, on the contrary, recognition of cultural differences meant a diversion from the fundamental social conflict of social inequality. But it was not only opposition from the political right and the orthodox left that challenged multicultural thought and politics; it was, paradoxically, the success – or the mainstreaming – of the politics of multiculturalism itself that has become a cause for its crisis and transformation. The dynamics of the expansion of identity politics into other fields of social practice (as is manifest in the ethnicization of politics, economy, the media industry and academia) has led to a fundamental questioning of the basic categories of early multiculturalism, such as community, authenticity and recognition. At the same time, the globalization of identity politics has seen a growing homogenization of strategies, semantics and practices. While this homogenization unites the claims of subaltern actors, it simultaneously undermines the particularity and the incommensurability of these actors' cultural differences in an increasingly fragmentized global ethnoscape. Combining theoretical reflections with a wide range of regional case studies from Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Mexico, this special issue explores recent multicultural and post-multicultural identity politics in the Americas.

The Emergence and Crisis of Multiculturalism

The rise of multiculturalism can be explained against the backdrop of the 20th-century epistemological dominance of monoculturalism (Goldberg, 1994, p. 7), which is best expressed by the idea of a homogeneous national identity. In its descriptive dimension, multiculturalism points to the ethnic and cultural diversity of the nation-state resulting from a variety of factors, such as: the colonization of aboriginal societies, slavery, migration and diaspora. The cultural heterogeneity of the nation is conceived in terms of population groups that are marginalized by mainstream society and thereby labeled minorities. So-called minorities are constituted through a shared collective identity based on cultural traditions (Kruks, 2000) as well as a particular experience of oppression and exclusion from resources; hence the demands for redress. As a normative concept, multiculturalism is related to the philosophical question concerning the status of collective and cultural rights in liberal democracies. The core of the political discussion on multiculturalism is the politics of recognition (Taylor, 1994). The politics of recognition is an ethical approach to recognizing a set of group rights that cannot be subsumed under the individual rights of the citizen (Kymlicka, 1995, 2001), thereby helping to defend minorities against the majority.

While challenging the monocultural definition of the nation, multicultural approaches are often themselves based on static and reified conceptions of culture. In line with the German philosopher Wolfgang Welsch, it can be argued that multiculturalism:

> [...] takes up the problems which different cultures have living together *within one society*. But therewith the concept basically remains in the duct of the traditional understanding of culture; it proceeds from the existence of clearly distinguished,

> in themselves homogeneous cultures – the only difference now being that these differences exist within one and the same state community.
>
> (Welsch, 1999, p. 196)

This reified concept of culture, which suggests that individuals belong to a particular population group, is also subject to Rogers Brubaker's (2004) critique of the pervasiveness of groupism in both theory and social practice. Groupism is common to both hegemonic multicultural politics that police social unrest as well as to subaltern identity politics, which invoke cultural identities in order to claim rights or retribution. With regard to subaltern multicultural identity politics, critics have argued that the struggle for recognition is shaped by ethnic dimensions that neglect class positions as well as gender issues (Cohen & Howard, 1999; Fraser & Honneth, 2003). In highlighting individuals' multiple identifications and their intersectionality, this vein of thought questions the idea of collective subjectivities, instead directing attention to the fragmentation of social subjectivities. It is thus a powerful argument in de-legitimizing subaltern positionings on the grounds of political philosophy and deconstructivism. However, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1996) conceptualization of 'strategic essentialism', which frames demands for collective rights in a much more reflexive way, allows for the articulation of different positionings while still drawing strategically on the concept of collective subjectivities. Despite the different ideological stances at stake in this debate, references to common historical experiences, roots, traditions, language, and homeland as well as to ethnic or gender difference can still be conceived of as one of the principal political instruments for mobilizing peers, and it remains a strong argument in the 'struggle for recognition' (Honneth, 1992; Taylor, 1994; Kymlicka, 2001).

Although the emergence of new social movements claiming recognition, participation and redistribution has occasionally been met by repressive institutional responses and open acts of violence, multiculturalism suggests a politics of symbolic recognition with only limited need for restitution or redistribution. From the subaltern perspective, these symbolic forms of recognition and retribution for the wrongs of postcolonial or patriarchal exploitation, displacement and exclusion culminate in the subjectification of new social actors. For the first time, subaltern actors form part of society and their opinions on matters of community are being heard – with the influence of marginalized individual voices being multiplied by the impact of social movements. In addition, there is now a chance for social mobility and the formation of new cultural elites and organic intellectuals from amidst these marginalized population groups. The different assets of multicultural politics in the United States and Canada, such as the positive discrimination of cultural minorities or affirmative action assuring access to education, academia and qualified jobs that were fought for in the *civil rights movements*, have been adopted worldwide in states' institutions of cultural politics and exported as part of good governance policies.

In the 1990s, the politics of multiculturalism had a widespread impact on the ways nation-states in the Americas confronted the cultural heterogeneity of their respective sovereigns in terms of what Donna Lee van Cott (2000) has called 'multicultural constitutionalism'. Under pressure from, especially indigenous, social

movements and supranational institutions, the political constitutions of almost all American nations have been amended (Büschges & Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2007). As cultural diversity is increasingly being perceived as part of a nation's resources, there is a clear tendency to legalize cultural and, especially, language rights, as well as common types of social organization. This development was accompanied by an extensive apparatus of demographic censusing and counting, which included the institutional consideration of categories such as cultural belonging or the experience of postcolonial wrongs, both fundamentally incommensurable with the arithmetic of censusing. These changes in the constitution of the nation-state may be accompanied by profound transformations in the established party system (Brysk, 2001) and by the emergence of new political actors defined by identity politics, as is the case, for example, in Bolivia. The reach of this apparent progress in 'multicultural constitutionalism,' however, has to be relativized. There exist a number of cases in the Americas with a noticeable breach between the constitutionally guaranteed rights of cultural minorities and the principles of political practice. In this context, Gisella Díaz Azofeifa explores in her article in this issue the paradoxes of Costa Rican multiculturalism. She argues that the acceptance and recognition of cultural diversity by the state has been superficial, and consequently insufficient to overcome structural barriers that still disadvantage indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities in Costa Rica today. Furthermore, several projects that contravene indigenous peoples' rights have been promoted by the Costa Rican government, such as mining and oil exploitation and a hydroelectric dam project.

One of the most striking dynamics of multiculturalism is its expansion and circulation in global discourses and institutions, although originally its single frame of reference was the nation-state, which served as the sole basis for subaltern identity politics as well as symbolic recognition and retribution. In this sense, Canada's approach to the politics of recognition, based on liberal political philosophy and its model of a pluralistic dialogue society (Taylor, 1994; Kymlicka, 1995, 2001), has inspired migration and multiculturalism debates on a global scale (Heintz, 2005; Geißler, 2004). Another stimulus for the transnationalization of multiculturalism comes from the strategic articulation of indigenous social movements from virtually all parts of the Americas. From the International Labour Organization Convention 169 in the late 1970s to the highly influential 1986 working paper by the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Indigenous Rights, Ecuadorian José Martínez Cobo, these indigenous identity politics have successfully put indigenous rights on the agendas of supranational institutions. The International Decade for Indigenous Peoples and several United Nations conferences on and commemorations of indigenous peoples leading up to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 show the impact and political sustainability of these efforts (Postero & Zamosc, 2004; Büschges & Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2007). Andrew Canessa argues in his contribution to this issue that the emergence of new indigenous citizenship in Bolivia under the government of Evo Morales has led to a strategic use of indigeneity that articulates a broad range of different ethnic and subaltern identity politics and that mediates between local and global discourses of indigenous identities.

All this does not imply, however, that multiculturalism in the Americas should be considered a smooth success story in terms of increasing the inclusion of formerly excluded 'minorities' or promoting a broader understanding of cultural rights and respect for cultural difference. Thus, for example, Gisella Díaz Azofeifa points out that the Costa Rican state has officially harmonized its domestic legislation with international standards by adopting a multicultural discourse without substantially confronting its monocultural preconception.

Another major critique of the transnational expansion of multiculturalism concerns the articulation of multiculturalism and neo-liberal politics in the 1990s (Bretón, 2001a, 2001b; Ulloa, 2005; Postero, 2007). Inspired by the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, this critical vein of thought postulates that indigenous communities can be infiltrated and employed as an instrument of new governmental techniques – techniques that can be described with the lemma 'government through community' (Rose, 1996, p. 332). The articulation of multiculturalism and neo-liberal politics is associated with international development corporations like USAID, the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank and its pilot program for indigenous people, PRODEPINE (Bretón, 2001a; Hale, 2002; Kaltmeier, 2009). In a redefinition of first-generation neo-liberal politics, these actors employed multiculturalism in foreign aid because they identified large amounts of social capital in indigenous communities that could be conveniently used and channeled (Bretón, 2001b; Martínez, 2005). Together with nation-states, these agencies established a regime of 'vision and division,' to which, following Charles Hale, we could refer as 'indio permitido' (2005, p. 24). Thus, the indigenous people who engaged in these projects of ethno-development were able to gain social recognition, while those who opposed and protested against them were labeled as criminals or terrorists. This repressive dimension of neo-liberal multiculturalism can be particularly seen in the case of Chile, where the Mapuche movement, whose territorial claims are in conflict with the vested interests of economic elites and state institutions, faces fierce repression from the state as part of a 'war on terror' – even while, after the transition to democracy, the Chilean state has simultaneously established a politics of ethnic recognition. From the perspective of the Global South, unveiling the link between multiculturalist and neo-liberal politics has been an important contribution to the debate on identity politics. Foucauldian approaches, however, have a certain tendency to become trapped by an 'aesthetics of domination' that overestimates the impact of neo-liberal governmentality on indigenous communities or individual subjects and does not address the 'ambivalence of autonomy' granted by such politics (Kaltmeier *et al.*, 2004).

For example, in Bolivia, the multicultural Ley de la Participación Popular [Law of Popular Participation, 1994] triggered far-reaching projects of resistance and decolonization as it provided the formal grounds for the formation and rise of new political movements like the Movimiento al Socialismo [Movement towards Socialism] that ultimately led to Evo Morales's presidency in 2005. In this sense, multiculturalism proved to be an important factor in the radicalization of indigenous identity politics, which, ultimately, led indigenous groups to start questioning the conceptual background of multiculturalism. Particularly the roots of

multiculturalism in western liberalisms and the Eurocentric epistemology of citizenship with its implicit nexus to post-Fordist forms of capitalism were much criticized. The inter-cultural, intra-cultural and pluri-cultural politics (Gutiérrez, 2010) that the Bolivian Constitution aimed for, which can be thought of as transcending multicultural forms of managing cultural diversity in pluri-ethnic nations, still shows evidence, however, of political negotiation emanating from the original ethos of multicultural policy. The Bolivian case shows that a series of factors have caused multiculturalism to be questioned (or be radically transcended) in a certain postcolonial constellation. Thus, a subaltern majority challenged the relatively weak legitimacy of a regime of political representation based clearly on ethnicist forms of hegemony. The regional and indigenous claims to autonomy led the nation-state into a fundamental crisis, culminating in the conceptualization of a 'pluri-national nation' (Yashar, 2005; Walsh, 2009). In this regard, the Bolivian case echoes multicultural political developments in Canada, which in 2006 recognized Québec as a nation within Canada, thus acknowledging multi-nationalism.

These governmental policies find different expressions in local contexts, which still have to be explored. Based on fieldwork in the Aymara community of Konkho in the Bolivian Highland, Andrew Canessa demonstrates that not all indigenous communities and individuals have equal access to the new political spaces and opportunities that are offered by the recent politics of indigeneity on behalf of Morales's government as well as by the United Nations Development Program, the World Bank or the International Labour Organization. As Canessa points out, although the discourses and politics of these institutional actors prove to be considerably detached from everyday life in Highland communities, they, nonetheless, generate forms of inclusion into the new political system of indigenous citizenship for peripheral communities.

In a similar vein, Santiago Bastos analyzes in his article the tensions in terms of identity and ideology that multiculturalism creates in everyday-life in Guatemala. Bastos argues that multicultural and neo-indigenist discourses find their expression in a revival of Maya culture, which united the indigenous movements in their fight for recognition in the 1990s. This has led to a 'mayanization of everyday life,' which Bastos analyzes in the fields of education and spirituality.

A further aspect that has only recently gained prominence in Latin American Studies on multiculturalism is the population of African descent and its role in society and culture. Amos Nascimento argues in this issue that most theoretical discussions on multiculturalism fail to discuss the continuous impact of African slavery in the Americas, thus negating the resulting conflictivity of (post)colonial cultural encounters. In the same vein, multicultural concepts of hybridity, *mestizaje* and syncretism that are frequently used in the self-description of (Latin-)American societies negate the struggles and conflicts of Afro descendents. Based on a 'critique of the ideology of syncretism,' Nascimento shows that there is a continuous struggle for recognition, which can be found in Brazil in different *locations* and historical moments. In articulating these various struggles and contexts, Nascimento affirms the need to move beyond syncretic multiculturalism towards what he calls an *interlocation* of cultures and identities.

Ideological Battlegrounds: Neo-conservative Backlash and Post-ethnic Freedom of Choice

The radical transcendence of the political philosophy of multiculturalism is only one of a series of setbacks that led to its crisis in the first decade of the 21st century; just as influential, for instance, is the pervasiveness of the neo-conservative backlash. This backlash was partly triggered by the attacks on the World Trade Center and on the Pentagon in 2001, an event that has become the symbol for the crisis in multicultural conflict management, which occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, the 'clash of civilizations' between the West and the Islamic World, which was already postulated by Samuel Huntington (1997), was transformed in his *Who Are We?* (Huntington, 2005) focus on the menace that mass migration from the South allegedly poses to white hegemony in the United States – that is, the 'browning of America.' Although Huntington's positions are rooted in a colonial tradition of white supremacist thought and racism, their renewed strength in the New Millennium and the way they are echoed by the radicalization of the right in the United States – from California Proposition 187, the 'English Only' Movement and the Minutemen to the current Tea Party Movement – shows just how much the once ethnically unmarked social mainstream has mobilized to oppose multiculturalism. As Arjun Appadurai (2006) has stated *vis-à-vis* the 'fear of small numbers' produced by accelerated globalization, fragile majorities regard so-called minorities as a problem because they challenge national narratives of social cohesion and homogeneity. In this sense, the renewed opposition against so-called minorities serves as an exorcism of the uncontrollable powers of capitalist globalization.

With regard to the European context, Paul Gilroy (2006) has argued that the postcolonial melancholia for imperial identities, which can be understood as a social pathology stemming from neo-imperialist politics in the New Millennium, leads to strategies of non-recognition and racial exclusion. A similar argument can be made for the Americas, where the crisis of hegemonic identities is one of the factors contributing to the crisis of multicultural politics, which continues to ignore the pluri-ethnic reality of societies. The example of the public floggings committed in 2008 in Sucre, Bolivia by white and *mestizo* citizens against indigenous *campesinos* shows a similar articulation of white supremacist thought and forms of repression that are deeply rooted in colonial regimes of power and drawn upon in response to radicalized multiculturalism (Ströbele-Gregor, 2011). At the same time, the regionalist autonomy movement from Santa Cruz, Bolivia that triggered these excesses also shows how much political formations on the right depend on the strategic use of cultural identity analogous to multiculturalism for the ideological safeguarding of traditional forms of hegemony. Thus, the loss of these identities' rootedness, which had long been unmarked (cf. critical whiteness studies), leads, paradoxically, to a further expansion of identity politics in terms of nostalgic belonging.

Multiculturalism has not only been questioned by the neo-conservative backlash in the New Millennium, there has also been a renewal of liberal critiques on the particularism of cultural rights. Such critiques go back to 19th-century liberalism,

but counter the expedient approach to cultural difference and social capital proposed by second-generation, multicultural neo-liberalism. At the core of the liberal position is an individualism that posits one's freedom of choice *vis-à-vis* one's different layers of identity (Sen, 2007). This 'freedom of choice' implies the liberal imaginary of a level playing field for all individuals within the framework of civil rights set out by the nation-state and presupposes that race does not determine one's prospects in life. Championed by representatives of both the traditional white hegemony (Sollors, 1991; Hollinger, 1995) as well as members of the new cultural elite promoted by multiculturalism's politics of recognition, this post-ethnic liberalism proposes that the ethno-racial classification system can finally be overcome on the basis of personal effort and success. In this sense, the election of Barack Obama as the first African American president of the United States signifies Hollinger's (2008) paradigm of a post-ethnic America; although it should be noted against the backdrop of the recent political situation in the United States that this position is now being widely contested (Reed, 2010).

Although this debate on the 'freedom of choice' is clearly related to liberalism's ideological assumptions, it hints at changing identity formations in a globalizing postmodern world. It can be stated that the consolidation of homogenized group identities in multicultural politics no longer corresponds to all aspects of the transnationalized life-experiences of occidental consumers (Dunn, 1998; Nederveen Pieterse, 2007). At the same time, however, the post-ethnic 'freedom of choice' ideology downplays the importance of the postcolonial *longue durée* of ethnic discrimination in defining the possibilities for social, cultural and political participation that members of subaltern population groups have – beyond the ethnic tokenism of accommodated and co-opted organic intellectual and economic elites. It is also blind to the pervasive ways of how the body is a residual category of colonial regimes of representation, offering only a limited scope of choice and transformation. The problems posed by this renewal of liberal individualism become even more evident with regard to the situation in Latin America, where fundamental inequalities have been discussed in terms of a 'colonial longue durée' (García Linera, 2006), or in terms of the 'coloniality of power' (Mignolo, 2000; Quijano, 2000). The coloniality of power, however, is not static; it highlights the ongoing re-accommodation of colonial structures in postcolonial contexts.

Post-multicultural Identity Politics

While multiculturalism as a powerful dispositive of the nation-state is in crisis, identity politics continue to play a crucial role in the struggle for the social principles of 'vision and division' that are at work in the Americas. We are thus facing a transition from multiculturalism to post-multicultural identity politics. This new kind of identity politics no longer views the nation as being divided into homogeneous and conflicting, quasi-ontological, collective identities based on static conceptions of community and authenticity. Instead, identification with cultural collectives is increasingly being seen as fragmented, polyvalent and ambiguous. This fluidity and performativity of cultural identities, however, does