DIVERSITY AND EDUCATION FOR ENTANGLEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Based on German Chancellor Angela Merkel's speech of October 2010, I analyze some significant differences between Germany and Canada in their commitments to multiculturalism. I juxtapose Merkel's divisive language to French philosopher Alain Badiou's premise that "there is only one world." While the theme for this special issue emphasizes "education for liberation," I argue for an education that entangles or, at least, that reveals the entanglements we cannot live without.

This past fall, the international media reported a remarkable speech by German Chancellor Angela Merkel. On October 16, 2010, when addressing a gathering of younger members of her conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party, she unequivocally declared multiculturalism in Germany a failure. According to the BBC voice-over of the video clip of the most controversial part of her speech, Merkel said the following:

> *We are a country which, at the beginning of the 1960s, actually brought guest workers to Germany. Now they live with us and we lied to ourselves for a while, saying that they won't stay and that they will disappear again one day. That is not the reality. This multicultural approach, saying that we simply live side by side and are happy about each other, this approach has failed, utterly failed.* (BBC, 2010)

In addition to the verdict about multiculturalism itself, one of the striking features of the speech is how strongly Merkel positions herself and the members of the CDU as the "we" who have watched the immigrant "them" enter Germany and—to make matters worse—decide to stay. Clearly, she assumes that immigrants or descendants of immigrants are not members of her party. But while these words are, to most Canadian ears, shocking enough, the translation conceals the cynical undertone of Merkel's words:

> *Wir sind ein Land, das im Übrigen Anfang der 60er Jahre die Gastarbeiter nach Deutschland geholt hat. Und jetzt leben sie bei uns. Wir haben uns eine Weile lang in die Tasche gelogen. Wir haben gesagt: Die werden schon nicht bleiben, irgendwann werden sie weg sein. Das ist nicht die Realität. Und natürlich war der Ansatz, zu sagen: Jetzt machen wir hier mal "Multi-kulti" und leben so nebeneinander her und freuen uns übereinander – dieser Ansatz ist gescheitert, absolut gescheitert.*
>
> (Euronews, 2010)

Merkel's language was informal, creating a sense of familiarity with her audience. A translation that conveys that informal and cynical tone might be:

> *We are a country which, at the beginning of the 1960s, actually brought guest workers to Germany. And now they live with us. For a while we kidded ourselves, saying, they won't stay anyway, at some point they'll be gone. That is not the reality. And of course the approach was to say: we'll do the "multiculti" thing here and live next to each other and be all cheerful about it—well that approach has failed, utterly failed.*

It seems to me that in Canada, in the year of the 40th anniversary of the Multiculturalism Act, such words would be unthinkable. This is not because multiculturalism in Canada has been achieved and we now live in a society in which—to borrow words from the policy itself— individuals and communities of all origins can participate fully and equitably in the continuing evolution and shaping of all

aspects of Canadian society. In fact, as many articles in this journal alone have documented, ethnic minorities continue to face significant challenges in Canada. For example, Valerie Preston and Ann Murnaghan (2005) write that,

> Despite the promises of multiculturalism, visible minority immigrants are experiencing exclusion and marginalization in Canada. One measure of their difficulties is the rising percentage of immigrant families that reported incomes below the low-income cut off, a frequent measure of poverty (p. 68).

And Luin Goldring (2010) calls attention to the fact that, with the expansion of temporary foreign worker programs in Canada, there is a widening gap on the basis of immigration status and citizenship rather than on the basis of ethnicity:

> To the extent that people whose status is precarious are not on an effective path to permanent residence, and much less to citizenship, current policy practice will entrench a two-tier membership in Canada, where no pathway leading to formal political participation and where they are not considered members of the nation where they live and work (p. 53).

Stating the obvious then, there are inequalities and injustices in Canadian society and Canadian multiculturalism is, at best, a work in progress. Moreover, there are significant differences among the provinces; for example, in February 2011, in the context of the debate over the wearing of the Sikh kirpan in the Quebec Legislature, Louise Beaudoin of the *Parti Québécois* pointed out that multiculturalism was not a Quebec policy, "since Quebec has not signed the Canada Act 1982 which enshrined multiculturalism within the Constitution" (Ibbitson, 2011).

However, in spite of the challenges with multiculturalism in Canada, I believe that Merkel's words could not have been uttered in Canada. Of course, the different histories of Germany and Canada are an important part of the explanation. The majority of the Canadian population is comprised of immigrants or their descendants from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds; the Aboriginal peoples made up 3.75% of the total population in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2009). By contrast, Germany was ethnically quite homogeneous until well into the 20th century. Elke Winter (2010) notes that "after the shameful experience of the Holocaust, a positive German identity in ethnocultural terms had become impossible" (p. 170). The idea of "multiculturalism" in 1980s Germany, then, was as much a way of reflecting the changed social fabric as a result of the arrival of guest workers, as it was an attempt "to break away from Germany's notorious legacy as an 'ethnic nation'" (Joppke, 1998, p. 300, as cited in Winter). In recent years, explicit pride in German culture and identity has seen an upsurge again in Germany while in Canada, the "commitment to immigrant multiculturalism as a normative idea remains strong" (Winter, p. 180).

There also seems to be a different awareness in Canada that the words we choose matter. Detractors of this tendency will mock it as "political correctness," a superficial attempt to paper over the cracks. But the point I wish to make here is that our language plays a role in widening or narrowing the cracks themselves. As I have argued elsewhere, following J. L. Austin and others, our "words not only *mean* something, but also *do* something" (Ruitenberg 2005, p. 40). Merkel's observation that "now they live with us" *means* that guest workers and their descendants now live with those whose families have been in Germany for generations. What it *does* is reinforce the gap between "us" and "them," between those who are German and those who are considered not German enough. It makes it painfully clear to guest workers and their families that no matter how hard they have worked and how much they have contributed to the German economy, they are still "guests" in a country they should not consider their own.

Language matters, perhaps especially when we stop paying attention to it, when words and expressions have become so commonplace that we forget to ask ourselves what kind of world they reflect, and whether it is a world we want to live in. The world that Canada's Multiculturalism Act wants to create is one in which Canadians of all ethnic origins can say "we"—not in a starry-eyed celebration of diversity, but in a sincere recognition of the webs of interdependence that make this country hang together. While the theme for this special issue is "Education for Liberation," I wish to propose instead, then, an education that highlights these webs of interdependence. It is not an education that liberates, but an education that entangles or, at least, that reveals the entanglements we cannot live without.

Of course, we strive for the education of "autonomous" citizens in the sense that we want citizens who can think for themselves rather than accept at face value what someone else tells them, and who can examine and ask critical questions of their political, religious and other leaders. But "liberation" also suggests a model of individual independence that covers over the important interdependence that characterizes our existence. None of us can live without the others' help, be it direct or indirect; we are all fundamentally insufficient to ourselves. So instead of an education that liberates, I argue for an education that impresses upon us the deep and ineradicable dependence that we have on others.

The guest workers to whom Merkel refers came to Germany in the 1960s and 70s. Now, almost half a century later, ongoing globalization has only expanded our interdependence farther beyond the borders of the nation state. In lieu of Merkel's divisive language, we should take note of the language of Alain Badiou (2008):

> The simple phrase, 'there is only one world', is not an objective conclusion. It is performative: we are deciding that this is how it is for us. Faithful to this point, it is then a question of elucidating the consequences that follow from this simple declaration. A first consequence is the recognition that all belong to the same world as myself: the African worker I see in the restaurant kitchen, the Moroccan I see digging a hole in the road, the veiled woman looking after children in a park. That is where we reverse the dominant idea of the world united by objects and signs, to make a unity in terms of living, acting beings, here and now. These people, different from me in terms of language, clothes, religion, food, education, exist exactly as I do myself; since they exist like me, I can discuss with them—and, as with anyone else, we can agree and disagree about things. But on the precondition that they and I exist in the same world (p. 38-39).

I want to stress that I quote these moving words not to invoke a "common humanity," the idea that we are "basically all the same." I simply do not believe this is the case, nor do I believe it is a helpful premise for the challenges of living well together in a society characterized by cultural diversity. Badiou emphasizes a common "existential situation," that of sharing the same world (p. 40), but he makes it very clear that this does not imply a shared ontological situation, some shared human substance: "The single world is precisely the place where an unlimited set of differences exist" (p. 39). I would go one step further and argue that the only sameness we share is an absence or lack, this lack is one of independence and self-sufficiency. As Judith Butler (2005) puts it,

> None of us is fully bounded, utterly separate, but, rather, we are in our skins, given over, in each other's hands, at each other's mercy. This is a situation we do not choose. It forms the horizon of choice, and it grounds our responsibility (p. 101).

So what kind of education takes into account this interdependence as the horizon of choice? What kind of education can help "elucidate the consequences that follow" from the declaration that there is only one world?

For one, it would be an education that does not treat "multiculturalism" as a decorative feature of Canadian society, to be celebrated in "multicultural days." Rather, it is a critical approach that makes students aware of the fact that the liberal pluralist framework that guides Canada's institutions is not, itself, culturally neutral, and that different individuals and groups find themselves closer to or further removed from this framework. Moreover, it takes into account the inequalities that affect people's lives, be they economic, racial, based on citizenship status, or otherwise. These inequalities are significant because, in the webs of interdependence to which I have referred, we are not all dependent on others *to the same extent and in the same ways.* While, ontologically speaking, we are all "beings who are formed in relations of dependency" (Butler, 2005, p. 20), in more practical terms we differ in the social privilege we carry based on, for example, our family's class background and our physical ability. As a consequence, the extent and form of our dependence on others varies. If we are able to get by more easily on our own, this is not a situation that gives us additional rights but, instead, one that comes with additional responsibilities.

Secondly, education that understands interdependence as our horizon of choice places less emphasis on individual achievement. Of course, talent and effort should be fostered and recognized, but we need not concentrate on individual "excellence"—a concept that, by definition, implies that others are left behind. Instead I argue for education that develops the understanding that nothing we say or do is our invention alone but always is a response—no matter how critical—to ideas and practices we have inherited (Ruitenberg, 2009a).

Finally, an education that reveals our mutual entanglements does not need to pretend that we always "live next to each other and are all cheerful about it"; there are political differences between us, differences in terms of the visions we have for what a desirable social order looks like (see, for example, Ruitenberg 2009b; 2010). In education we should not shy away from disagreement, as long as we remember that, as Badiou puts it, "we can agree and disagree about things. But on the precondition that they and I exist in the same world" (p. 39). In other words, the acknowledgement that my political adversary and I share a world precedes but does not eclipse our disagreement.

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