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Self-determining Multiculturalism

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Abstract

The burgeoning human rights discourse of the twentieth century inspired new attention to the location of minority groups within the nation-state and their experiences of violence, discrimination and inequality. The result has been attempts by the nation to address the diversity of its population through the recognition of cultural difference. Attending to two particular rights claims—those of Indigenous self-determination and multiculturalism—we can find a tendency toward subsuming the former within those of the latter. This is a move that results from a top-down approach to the recognition of difference, reproducing colonialist priorities and jurisprudence, and significantly undermining the goals and meanings of Indigenous self-determination. By contrast, when self-determination is approached from the bottom-up, we can gain new perspectives on the meanings of this Indigenous right, expanded to encompass a range of relationships, all crucially built in response to Indigenous identities as First Peoples.

Keywords

Universal rights, Indigenous rights, multiculturalism, self-determination, recognition.

Self-determining Multiculturalism

The burgeoning human rights discourse of the twentieth century inspired new attention to the location of minority groups within the nation-state and their experiences of violence, discrimination, and social and economic inequality. Acknowledging their responsibilities to all their citizens, liberal democracies have engaged in projects of addressing cultural diversity and protecting people's rights in the name of equality, respect and justice. Although operating from a fundamental principle of 'universality', there are, of course, no universal agreements as to what it means to protect, tolerate or accommodate diversity, or why this matters, and so close attention is always required if we are to consider what these efforts actually accomplish.

This article considers the construction and recognition of self-determination as a right of Indigenous peoples and as a means by which settler nations attempt to respond to Indigenous sovereignties, as well as address the presence of difference in their borders. Of particular concern is the association, often confusion, of self-determination rights with those of multiculturalism. With the overlap in the protections these rights offer and the seeming similarities of their intent, 'multiculturalism' can present itself as an appropriate, and less threatening, means of addressing Indigenous rights than that of 'self-determination'.

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The result, it is argued, is a tendency toward subsuming projects of Indigenous self-determination within multicultural protections—a move that significantly undermines the goals and meanings of self-determination.

In order to examine what is at stake, 'self-determination' and 'multiculturalism' are considered from what Jakeet Singh (2014) terms a "top-down" and a "bottom-up" approach to the politics of cultural difference: The former conceives the recognition of group rights from the perspective of the state, projected as a form of cultural justice bestowed by the nation through means of institutional provisions, affirmations or accommodations (47–49). With its tendency to favour existing structures of authority and to conceive self-determination primarily in terms of autonomy and sovereignty, such an approach to these rights claims finds state power threatened, and so responding in ways that maintain, rather than decentre, colonial authority; conceiving Indigenous rights in terms of multicultural protections is one of the ways in which this is achieved.

By contrast, a bottom-up approach to self-determination prioritises the perspectives and voices of non-state actors, activists and marginalised populations. This approach views normative frameworks as arising as a result of, not prior to, dialogue and enables these frameworks to be constantly called into question and renegotiated according to the diverse positions and needs of those involved (Singh 2014, 48–49). A bottom-up approach thus allows us to expand our conception of self-determination to include a spectrum of rights claims, as well as to locate the crucial statements made when these claims are expressed from a position of self-determination, which cannot be accomplished through multiculturalism.

Building on the personal understandings of self-determination shared with the author in individual interviews with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians,[i] and taking a particular focus on Australia's approaches to dealing with difference, it is argued that self-determination can be understood not as a separation of Indigenous peoples from majority societies, but specifically as a move toward increased engagement between these groups, enabling Indigenous peoples to build different kinds of relationships and so to restructure their positions within mainstream institutions. Vitally, asserting their rights to do so in the name of self-determination emphasises people's identities, not just as one more diverse group within the diversity of the nation, but as the nation's *First Peoples*, making a critical statement of status and identity from which all subsequent relationships must be built.

Human rights, national responsibilities

Global rhetoric of human rights swelled in the 1940s, in the aftermath of two world wars fought in quick succession. Seeking "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind", the Charter of the United Nations (UN) resolved "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small" (1945, Preamble). Committed to the protection of international peace and security, the UN's Charter dedicated member states, among other things, to the development of "friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples" and to the promotion of "respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion" (1945, Article 1). Here we find the emergence of self-determination as a right valued on par with that of human equality, dignity and freedom.

The young organisation reiterated the critical nature of these principles even more forcefully only three years later in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948). As proclaimed on this international stage, the protection of human rights took expression as both a moral and practical imperative, situated as the foundation for global justice and stability (1948, Preamble). Implicitly, too, the absolute articulations of human equality made here, and of governmental responsibilities to respect and protect it, tied a nation's identity and reputation—its self-knowledge and how it is known by others—to its realisation of minority rights. As independence movements following World War II pushed processes of decolonisation, and as racism and authoritarianism were recognised as the source of social unrest and rejected as morally indefensible, the UN's promise that "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind" (1948, Article 2) affirmed equality as the highest ideal for nations to attain for their citizenry.

This language of human rights, expressed with a moral force backed by the watchful eyes of an international body, has imposed significant responsibilities upon any nation toward the protection of its citizens. At the same time, it is painfully ambivalent with regards to the precise nature of those responsibilities. While the principle of universality, upon which minority rights are predicated, provides for the full participation of all people within all activities of the nation, its corollary would see the application of different laws to different people as the very essence of discrimination. In the first decades following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the prevalent argument said that the best way to realise individual equality and freedom was through the protection of individual rights; recognising group rights would either break with equality or would simply be redundant (Ivison 2010, 5–6). With this, too, standard liberal responses to cultural diversity initially emphasised assimilation and toleration, with citizens expected to integrate by conforming to the dominant culture (Levey 2010, 19).

That said, while focusing its protections on the rights of the individual, the nation did still need to identify and attend to the needs of the group. As expressed by the UN, the protection of people's freedoms is essential, not simply because it is just, but because it is vital to (inter)national safety and security. A large component motivating the recognition of minority rights, then, can be seen in the desire to create a national unity, binding diverse communities to the larger polity through feelings of affinity, promoting stability through common bonds: "Citizenship is not just a certain status, defined by a set of rights and responsibilities. It is also an identity, an expression of one's membership in a political community" (Kymlicka and Norman 1994, 369). The more the nation integrates previously-excluded groups into this citizenry, the theory goes, the more they are united through this shared identity.

This position, however, has increasingly been found to be inadequate, with many groups still feeling excluded from the common culture by virtue of their sociocultural identities—their 'differences'—despite possessing common rights of citizenship (Kymlicka and Norman 1994, 370):

> In a society where some groups are privileged while others are oppressed, insisting that as citizens persons should leave behind their particular affiliations and experiences to adopt a general point of view serves only to reinforce the privilege; for the perspective and interests of the privileged will tend to dominate this unified public, marginalizing or silencing those of other groups. (Young 1989, 257)

Accordingly, people have recommended alternatives of ‘differentiated citizenship’, where groups are folded into the political community and afforded particular rights according to their group identity.

With this, Kymlicka and Norman (1994) distinguish three categories of minority rights: The first is special representation rights, claimed by disadvantaged people, such as the poor, the elderly or the disabled. Demands for special representation within political processes are a response to conditions of oppression and, therefore, should be considered as temporary. In this situation, the responsibility of the state is to remove the conditions of oppression that are denying these groups their fair equality, which, once achieved, extinguishes any further need for special rights.

The second category is multicultural rights, applying to immigrant and religious groups. Here, protections are required to allow people to express their cultural particularity and pride without this hampering their success in the economic and political life of the dominant society. The attendant obligation of the state is to promote people’s linguistic and institutional integration so that they have equal opportunities in the nation’s basic educational, political and economic institutions, as well as to reform those institutions so that minority integration does not require a denial of separate ethnocultural identities (Kymlicka 2001, 53–54). With this intention of protecting expressions of identity, multicultural rights are not temporary, but inherent, aimed at promoting the inclusion of diverse groups within the larger society while maintaining their religious and cultural practices.

Finally, the third category is that of self-government, which is used here in alignment with the right of self-determination, applicable specifically (and only) to national minorities. The distinction between national minorities and immigrant groups is essential, where the former are

> ‘cultures’, ‘peoples’, or ‘nations’, in the sense of being historical communities, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given homeland or territory, sharing a distinct language and history. These nations find themselves within the boundaries of a larger political community, but claim the right to govern themselves in certain key matters, in order to ensure the full and free development of their culture and the best interests of their people. What these national minorities want is not primarily better representation in the central government but, rather, the transfer of power and legislative jurisdictions from the central government to their own communities. (Kymlicka and Norman 1994, 372)

In each of these forms of group-differentiated rights, the goal is the same; that is, reducing the vulnerability of minorities to the economic pressures and political decisions of the larger society (Kymlicka 1995, 37). Why these groups need (and are able) to claim these protections, however, and how they are to be gained, depends on their positions and identities within the larger society. Significantly, these positions and identities are not fixed; at any given time people can potentially claim any one (or any combination) of these three rights. Indigenous peoples worldwide face disproportionate rates of poverty, unemployment, substance abuse, incarceration, suicide and ill health, the ongoing legacies of colonialism. In the face of these concerns, it is legitimate to frame the need for Indigenous rights in terms of special representation—a temporary form of ‘affirmative action’ put in place until this systematic disadvantage has been removed.

Where processes of colonisation are seen to have disrupted the cohesion of Indigenous institutions, territories, languages and traditions—that which defines them as national minorities—it could seem appropriate to situate Indigenous rights within frameworks of multiculturalism, confronting negative stereotypes and enabling Indigenous peoples to maintain aspects of their ethnic particularity, while helping them to integrate within the institutions of mainstream society.

Importantly, however, even when it may be variously appropriate to situate Indigenous needs within one of these other categories of rights claims, this is never a revocation of claims of self-determination. That is, by asserting themselves as citizens of the nation and claiming the rights due to them as such, Indigenous peoples are not, in turn, denying their identities as Indigenous peoples or rescinding their demands for their attendant inherent rights. Emphasising that these different rights claims can coexist, then, is also to emphasise that the distinctions between them should not be blurred, nor one be allowed to subsume the other, as to do so is to fail to recognise people's complete identities or build relationships accordingly. Such is the danger of channelling of Indigenous rights claims into expressions of multiculturalism.

Self-determination from the top-down

Ostensibly, the international community has formally affirmed Indigenous rights of self-determination. Adopted by the General Assembly in 2007, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) acknowledges the historic injustices of colonisation, including the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands, and responds unequivocally: "Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development" (United Nations 2007a, Article 3). Alongside this right of self-determination, the exercise of which can include "autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs" (Article 4), the UNDRIP simultaneously affirms their possession of all fundamental human rights and freedoms "as recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights law" (Article 1), as well as their retention of their rights "to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State" (Article 5).

While the UNDRIP appears to insist on a complete spectrum of rights claims to coexist, rather than praise this work of the UNDRIP, many have been quick to draw out the severe limitations of the recognition it offers (see, for example, Moreton-Robinson 2011; Watson 2011). In particular, this is a result of the weak offerings it provides toward overturning the state-controlled nature of self-determination and the subject positioning of Indigenous peoples as domesticated populations under the nation's jurisdiction (Watson 2011, 630). Notably, the four countries that refused to sign the UNDRIP at the time of its acceptance by the General Assembly were the four major settler-colonial states: Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. First among Australia's objections to the Declaration was its inclusion of self-determination:

> Self-determination applies to situations of decolonization and the break-up of States into smaller States with clearly defined population groups. It also applies where a particular group within a defined territory is disenfranchised and is denied political or civil rights. It is not a right that attaches to an undefined subgroup of a population seeking to obtain political independence. The

> Government of Australia supports and encourages the full and free engagement of indigenous peoples in the democratic decision-making processes in their country, but it does not support a concept that could be construed as encouraging action that would impair, even in part, the territorial and political integrity of a State with a system of democratic representative Government. (United Nations 2007b, 11)

Last among Australia's objections was the Declaration's treatment of Indigenous customary law, expressing concern that it was given priority over national law.

> Customary law is not law in the sense that modern democracies used the term; it is based on culture and tradition. It should not override national laws and should not be used selectively to permit the exercise of practices by certain indigenous communities that would be unacceptable in the rest of the community. (United Nations 2007b, 12)

Throughout Australia's response, then, we find firm assertion of the prerogative of the state and state institutions in deciding when and how to accommodate (or eliminate) Indigenous difference.

By the end of 2010, all four dissenting settler-colonial states agreed to support the UNDRIP. However, each continued to assert its ultimate authority over all citizens, disavowing Indigenous self-determination and so containing any threat that this right could pose to state sovereignty. Seeing structures of power so unshaken, some scholars reject the notion that a politics of recognition or self-determination can provide any means for Indigenous peoples to break free of the constraints of colonialism. Glen Coulthard (2014) takes the 'politics of recognition' to refer to

> the now expansive range of recognition-based models of liberal pluralism that seek to 'reconcile' Indigenous assertions of nationhood with settler-state sovereignty via the accommodation of Indigenous identity claims in some form of renewed legal and political relationship with the [nation] state (3)

Such models, Coulthard asserts, tend to call for the delegation of land, capital and political power from the state to Indigenous communities, seemingly supporting their self-determination. Yet, instead, liberal politics of recognition, in fact, "reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples' demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend" (3), an effect accomplished by enticing Indigenous peoples to identify with the asymmetrical, nonreciprocal forms of recognition imposed on or granted to them by the settler state (25).

Thus, even when nations grant native title—what, arguably. should be a clear return of sovereignty to the land's traditional owners—we can find the opposite occurring:

> In the Australian settler colony, native title figures in the liberal imagination as a moment where some sort of hybridization of sovereignty could be achieved. But once historicized in this context, it signifies not a pluralistic sharing of lawmaking power but rather an incorporation of Indigenous sovereignties which limits their possibilities by transforming them into a supplement to the decentered settler sovereignty that is destabilized by the acknowledgment of precolonial—and continuing—Indigenous communities. As such a supplement, it therefore suppresses the danger of the end of *terra nullius,* reaffirming the force of settler

> law through reburying Indigenous sovereignties at its foundation. This is the condition of their recognition. (Silverstein 2012, 62)

In sum, top-down approaches to self-determination repeatedly return us to an intact colonial power constraining Indigenous rights within an ongoing practice of colonial prerogatives and jurisprudence.

Multiculturalism from the top-down

Some of the subtle machinations of the colonialist power at work above can be attributed to the moral language of 'justice' and 'equality' it generally employs. Outside of a legal framework, the use of 'recognition' within liberal democratic theory has come to refer to the universal dignity of all people, as well as the respect they each deserve to enjoy. The recognition of difference serves as a foil to previous relationships in which some groups were denigrated as inferior to others and where this inferiority was used as justification for their discrimination, forced assimilation and the perpetration of other violence. Principles of multiculturalism intend to serve this more positive form of relationship, extending the argument that protecting and respecting the individual requires protecting and respecting certain social and cultural identities. "If human beings are also culturally embedded beings then equal respect for individuals means equal respect for the cultural forms they inhabit and help sustain" (Ivison 2010, 7).

As a means of defending diversity and reversing histories of discrimination, multiculturalism and self-determination share remarkable similarities and, in Australia, there has been a notable parallel development of multicultural and Indigenous policy. Upon its federation in 1901, the new Commonwealth of Australia immediately passed the Immigration Restriction Act (or, the 'White Australia' policy), an Act aimed at preventing the entrance of non-Europeans into the country. As Australia sought to preserve its white, Christian, Anglo-Saxon identity through the prevention of immigration of anyone other, it further sought to contain internal threats to its identity through an Aboriginal policy of protection, legislation that segregated Aboriginal people to stations, missions and reserves, 'caring' for a presumed 'dying race' in its final moments, while attempting to prevent the social confusion of miscegenation. As such, approaches to diversity became increasingly problematic for Australian governments in the anti-racism, anti-discrimination and decolonisation movements of the mid-twentieth century, so Australia moved toward policies of assimilation for both immigrant and Aboriginal Australians. It was not until 1973, one year following the implementation of self-determination as Aboriginal policy, that multiculturalism made its first appearance in government, soon defined as 'cultural pluralism', with an attendant focus on social cohesion and the recognition of culture, equal opportunity and adequate access to services (Boese and Phillips 2011, 190; Moran 2011; see also van Krieken 2012).

In this way, we can create a near-single narrative of Australia's approach to diversity. Remembering the historic and ongoing disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal Australians, it is neither surprising, nor entirely inappropriate, that national agendas of social inclusion should prioritise their needs and concerns alongside those of others facing significant forms of disadvantage and discrimination. That said, multiculturalism is not an innocuous discourse for Indigenous peoples, or, indeed, any other minority group. Critics of multiculturalism often point to the limits of toleration and accommodation it imposes, drawing out its similarities with the imperial or hierarchical, racial modes of political order that it supposedly displaced. Once again, the forms of recognition that multiculturalism

provides are problematic: Cultures qualifying for these rights are assumed to be homogenous and bounded; do not challenge the legitimacy of the state; and meet its image of the 'good immigrant'. From this perspective, liberal, legal pluralism simply re-subordinates marginal groups, keeping them in a legal system that leaves their disadvantage intact (Ivison 2010, 4).

Multiculturalism proves only more problematic as a site for addressing Indigenous rights. As a nation-building project and a means of re-imagining national identity, multiculturalism supports the indigenising of the settler state. By stressing that multiculturalism applies to all groups in Australia, not just non-Anglo immigrants, this framework claims that no ethnic group holds a pre-eminent place in the national identity, thereby removing possibility of a primary positioning of Indigenous people, simultaneously opening space for their stories within that of the nation. Thus, a multicultural Australia creates a logic for co-opting Aboriginal cultures into its unifying narrative, giving historical and spiritual depth to the nation, while rooting Australian identity more firmly to the continent (Moran 2011, 2159–2161). No longer asking Australians to forget that Indigenous people had ever been present there, this explicit inclusion of their cultures in the country's multicultural makeup achieves the same effect of eliminating Indigenous sovereignties and 'neutralising' their competing consciousness—this time, through their assimilation into a common fabric of diversity (Evans et al. 2013, 4).

Additionally, where all Australians share in multiculturalism, they gain the means to make their own claims on Indigenous people as equal citizens of the nation. Qualitative studies conducted in 2006 and 2011 found Australian residents frequently citing 'multicultural' and 'diverse' as descriptors for the nation and its citizens (Moran 2011, 2162). A 2009 study had similar findings, with research participants praising this identity, while revealing some common standards of behaviour expected of those enjoying an 'Australian way of life', central among these being the 'fair go' (Moran 2011, 2163). The idea that Indigenous people should be able to make additional claims on the state by virtue of the fact that they are Indigenous rubs against this notion of fairness and equality, represented by the expression 'fair go'. This provides the ammunition for government leaders and average citizens alike to object to forms of Indigenous rights that would extend beyond those of normal citizenship.

Once again, we find the recognition offered to be defined and constrained by colonialist configurations of state power, reproduced in multiculturalism and so rendering it ill-equipped to respond to Indigenous contexts or to provide Indigenous justice (Povinelli 2002; Tully 1995).

Recognising difference differently: Bottom-up possibilities

Given all these complications and contradictions, 'self-determination' can come to feel impossible as a lived reality: "It's quite difficult for the issues of self-determination and reconciliation to be acquired by those oppressed nations of individual tribal groups across [Australia], when it is governed by paternalistic, mission-management-minded, 1900s-state-of-mind government agencies. It's virtually impossible" (Gary Pappen, personal interview, November 10, 2010); "the world is forever changing, cultures are merging, and we expect cultures that are coming into Australia to merge. I think, unfortunately, that's happening within our own Aboriginal culture as well" (Sean Mitchell, personal interview, March 25, 2011); "hopefully it just doesn't turn out to be assimilation down the track, that

all of our children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren are just the same as everybody else" (Dawn Casey, personal interview, November 19, 2010).

Acknowledging these fears, it is significant to consider the range of other responses received when discussing with people their own understandings of the meaning of 'self-determination'. Perhaps most often, people found the concept too difficult and complex to define succinctly, pointing to the variety of circumstances in which Aboriginal people live and so the necessity for different forms of response in pursuit of varying goals. Some rejected the term as, at best, meaningless and, at worst, harmful, creating the expectation that Aboriginal people could, would or should abide by Australian law as anyone else yet at the same time establish their own space outside of that system—an impossible contradiction. Others related Indigenous self-determination to an autonomy in decision-making, connecting this as well to economic independence, as the former is impossible without the latter. Finally, many related the meaning of self-determination to questions of identity; that is, to the ability to know and define oneself and to engage that self-knowledge in association with others. Importantly, such definitions do not divorce the meaning of self-determination from the premise of autonomy, but they redirect the focus of this autonomy, adding an important dimension and depth to goals of empowering Indigenous people in their associations with the broader nation.

Taken together, with all of these responses, the suggestion is that self-determination is fluid and dynamic, and so best approached as such:

> Whilst, I guess, compared to pre-colonization, communities are maybe fractured, there's a redefinition of community to suit current existence, of how things are on this land here. So, I guess, self-determination, what it means shifts in terms of the context of the history. (Alex Smith, personal interview, May 19, 2011)

Remembering that each situation will have its own particularities to address, an important part in all of this, too, is remembering that none of the issues raised here is either/or. To begin with, absolute distinctions between 'Indigenous' and 'non-Indigenous' people are arbitrary and unhelpful:

> Aboriginal people are just like everyone else, want to have the same things other people have. They say, 'if you have land rights, go do what you were traditionally happy doing'. It's like, 'no, mate! Television has been invented! Movies have been invented! We want to do that sort of stuff with our culture now!' People don't seem to think that Aboriginal people can be dynamic and want the same things that they see everyone around them having. (Laura McBride, personal interview, December 8, 2010)

Divvying up Indigenous rights between categories of economic equality, social integration or cultural protection is also unproductive:

> In a way, [self-determination is] this idea of being heard. But, at the same time, how can you have self-determination if you don't have the health or the education to inform people? To live a life where you can fulfil that meaning and those values? (Karyn Cameron, personal interview, March 28, 2011)

In the end (and not surprisingly), all of these issues are intertwined for contemporary Australians:

> I think we need a two-pronged attack: The one would be economic independence of Aboriginal people. You can determine your future, choices in your future, if you have economic independence. If you don't, you don't have choice. You've got one way to live and that's poor.
>
> The other is a strong cultural identity, because it gives you a sense of well-being … creating a strong sense of self, a way of coping with the world because you have a strong set of values and a strong set of principles, because you have a strong culture …
>
> I'm convinced that culture and economic independence are intertwined and that that's what Aboriginal self-determination is all about. (Alison Page, personal interview, December 15, 2010)

This is not to say, however, that there is no fundamental nature to be found, nor any qualifying criterion for claims of self-determination. In 2011, one of the author's research participants sent out a workplace questionnaire about reconciliation and described some of the prevalent responses received:

> There was a comment about equality saying, 'why would we do this just for the Indigenous community? Why not for other minorities or other disadvantaged groups?' … Well, Aboriginal people are Australia's First People. There's your short answer. And they have suffered for years injustices.' (Elisha Smith, personal interview, May 11, 2011)

Contained in Elisha's answer, we can discern the assertion of an important idea: That for all that Indigenous rights are needed to redress the injustices of the past, those injustices refer to more than the substantive inequalities people continue to experience. Equally, they refer to the nation's ongoing failure to acknowledge the significance of their unique positions as First Peoples.

If claims of self-determination rights do not always entail demands for governance of particular territories, connection to land remains central to the recognition of Indigenous identities, positionings and rights. As exhorted by Irene Watson, "We cannot lose more ground than has already been stolen from us. That is why we cannot let go of our position: that of peoples who are not of a state, but of the land" (2011, 632). While multiculturalism addresses a nation of immigrants, Indigenous peoples stand apart, the only citizens who do not share this identity. While they may make similar claims on the state as other members of the nation (equal access to services and infrastructure; rights to culture, language and heritage; protection from discrimination; and so on), they do not make these claims from the same place or in the same voice. Hearing this is a central part of understanding Indigenous self-determination.

Moreover, approaching rights discussions with this specific awareness of engaging with First Peoples more closely approaches the core fundamentals that Watson (2011, 634) identifies as integral to Indigenous concepts of recognition; respect, collectivity and reciprocity. Engaging with Indigenous rights from a position that truly listens to Indigenous subjectivities and responds to Indigenous philosophies thus participates not in a 'politics of recognition', but a 'politics of authentic self-affirmation'; one that combats the objectification, alienation and manipulation of the true selves of Indigenous peoples by contemporary colonialism (Alfred 2014, x).

Conclusion

The demand for self-determination, perhaps, can be best understood, not as a reifying of boundaries, but a breaking-down, a desire for opportunities for more prolonged and more meaningful exchanges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, such that a plurality of perspectives can be expressed and heard. With this, the goal becomes to promote engagements in which alternate voices can be heard and meanings shared, rather than imposed: "There's that campaign, Closing the Gap [on Indigenous Disadvantage], and I remember one Indigenous speaker saying, 'close the gap? These two cultures will never come together. That's the wrong term. There needs to be a bridging'" (Alex Smith, personal interview, May 19, 2011). Such a bridging implies processes of communication that acknowledge the value of people's various perspectives and work to build agreement between them.

> This country of ours, it's full of Indigenous law. But how can we make the government be aware that there's two sides? We've got more rights to express our law as well and how we follow the European law. And how you can work within both ways. (Terry Murray, personal interview, April 8, 2011)

This is also where we begin to find the promise of self-determination, seen in the effort to develop shared understandings between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and institutions, permitting positive forms of mutual recognition and nurturing future interactions. "Once you start to get the recognition, people get used to the idea of these things and then you can actually start to work together to make things better. Reconciliation should actually work. I can't see why it wouldn't" (David Ingrey, personal interview, September 8, 2010). This is not, of course, to imply that the work of recognition (or reconciliation or self-determination) is simple or can be taken on as a matter of course. But it is to expand our visions of self-determination and the relationships that this right implies—measured by the quality of reciprocal exchange that they encourage; the mutual understanding and awareness that they build; and the flexibility they provide for negotiating relative positions, beyond established expectations.

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[i] Interviews were conducted between January 2010 and May 2011 in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth, with the informed written consent of all participants. Those who chose to remain anonymous have been reassigned the common surname ‘Smith’, together with a unique, gender-neutral identifier.