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# Cosmopolitan urbanism: a love song to our mongrel cities

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### Introduction

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If the *Satanic Verses* is anything, it is a migrant's eye view of the world. It is written from the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis (slow or rapid, painful or pleasurable) that is the migrant condition, and from which, I believe, can be derived a metaphor for all humanity. Standing at the center of the novel is a group of characters most of whom are British Muslims . . . struggling with just the sort of great problems that have arisen to surround the book, problems of hybridization and ghettoization, of reconciling the old and the new. Those who oppose the novel most vociferously today are of the opinion that intermingling with a different culture will inevitably weaken and ruin their own. I am of the opposite opinion. The *Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. Melange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world . . . The *Satanic Verses* is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love song to our mongrel selves.

(Rushdie 1992: 394)

In this defence of his controversial novel, Salman Rushdie staked out some of the territory that I want to cover in this chapter. I want to use the metaphor of the mongrel city to characterize an emerging urban condition in which difference, otherness, multiplicity, heterogeneity, diversity and plurality prevail. For some this is to be feared, signifying

the decline of civilization as we know it in the West. For others it is to be celebrated as a great possibility: the possibility of living alongside others who are different, learning from them, creating new worlds with them, instead of fearing them. My recent project has been to provide a better understanding of the emergence of *cities of difference* in the context of globalization and other related social forces; and to reflect on the challenges which these mongrel cities present in the twenty-first century to the city-building professions (architects, planners and urban designers, landscape architects, engineers), to city dwellers, and to conventional notions of citizenship (Sandercock 2003). My central question is how can 'we', (all of us), in all of our differences, be 'at home' in the increasingly multicultural and multiethnic cities of the twenty-first century? Or, as James Donald (1999) puts it more vigorously, how can we stropky strangers live together in these (mongrel) cities without doing each other too much violence? That seems to me to be the central and defining question for a cosmopolitan urbanism.

By the late twentieth century, cosmopolitanism as a concept/world view was regarded with considerable disapproval by a variety of respected theorists. David Harvey (2000) has critiqued the Kantian origins of cosmopolitanism as 'nothing short of an intellectual and political embarrassment', based largely on Kant's egregious racism. Peter Van der Veer (2002) dismisses cosmopolitanism for its complicity in the centuries-long Western colonial project. Craig Calhoun (2002), in a devastating turn of phrase, portrays cosmopolitanism as the preferred ethical orientation of those privileged to inhabit the frequent-traveller lounges. Yet, in spite of this bad rap, there has been a resurgence of cosmopolitan theorizing since the mid-1990s. Hollinger has given persuasive reasons for the emergence at this historical moment of formulations of a new cosmopolitanism. Among the historical circumstances that have most obviously helped to call forth this movement, he argues, are the dead ends reached by identity politics within the USA, the destruction caused by ethno-religious nationalism in the wake of the end of the Cold War, and the challenges to provincial orientations presented by globalization (Hollinger 2002: 228). Various other authors and volumes have sought to make a case for a 'new cosmopolitanism' (Nussbaum 1996; Cohen and Nussbaum 1996; Brennan 1997; Cheah and Robbins 1998; Beck 1999; Falk 2000; Zachary 2000; Hollinger 2002; Vertovec and Cohen 2002). Two of these authors have gone so far as to issue 'cosmopolitan manifestos' (Nussbaum 1996; Beck 1999). While there is

no shared political philosophy among these new cosmopolitan theorists, they do share a preoccupation with such global issues as international peace and governance, the state of the environment, social development and human rights abuses, and a desire to stimulate an overall ‘process of world thinking’ (Vertovec and Cohen 2002: 21).

As an urbanist with an interest, beyond theory, in the actual conditions of existence in the world’s cities, and in practical and policy questions around managing our peaceful coexistence in shared spaces, I bring a different spin to the new discourse on cosmopolitanism. Along with the geographers who conceived this volume of essays, I seek to harness cosmopolitan thinking to the actual spaces of cities, as sites of meaning making (of belonging), and of a located politics. In this chapter I want to argue for a *cosmopolitan urbanism* as a normative project that is a necessary response to the empirical reality of multicultural cities. Such a project has at least two dimensions: a social imaginary of living together in difference, and a political philosophy capable of overcoming the weaknesses of twentieth-century multiculturalism. In Part 1, I discuss three sociological imaginings and accounts of how we might live together in all of our differences. Through these different imaginings I explore what it means to be ‘at home’ in an increasingly globalized world; what a sense of belonging might be based on in a multicultural society; and how to encourage more intercultural encounters, exchanges, and solidarity. I take seriously Calhoun’s argument that not only tolerance but also solidarity is required for people to live together and join in democratic self-governance (Calhoun 2002: 108). Part 2 begins with a brief critique of the twentieth-century multicultural project, which has sometimes been mistakenly identified with a cosmopolitan urbanism. It then proceeds to outline a twenty-first-century *intercultural* project as a more truly cosmopolitan project grounded in political community and agonistic democracy rather than ethno- (or any other sub-)cultural identity as a basis for a sense of belonging in mongrel cities.

## **Part 1: How might we live together in all of our differences? Three imaginings**

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### **Richard Sennett: togetherness in difference**

In *Flesh and Stone* (1994: 358) Sennett laments that the apparent diversity of Greenwich Village in New York is actually only the

diversity of the gaze, rather than a scene of discourse and interaction. He worries that the multiple cultures that inhabit the city are not fused into common purposes and wonders whether 'difference inevitably provokes mutual withdrawal'. He assumes that if the latter is true, then 'a multicultural city cannot have a common civic culture' (Sennett 1994: 358). For Sennett, Greenwich Village poses a particular question of how a diverse civic culture might become something people feel in their bones. He deplors the ethnic separatism of old multicultural New York and not only looks but longs for evidence of citizens' understanding that they share a common destiny. This becomes a hauntingly reiterated question: nothing less than a moral challenge, the challenge of living together not simply in tolerant indifference to each other, but in active engagement. For Sennett, then, there is a normative imperative in the multicultural city to engage in meaningful intercultural interaction.

Why does Sennett assume that sharing a common destiny in the city necessitates more than a willingness to live with difference in the manner of respectful distance? Why should it demand active engagement? He does not address these questions, nor does he ask what it would take, sociologically and institutionally, to make such intercultural dialogue and exchange possible, or more likely to happen. But more recently other authors have begun to ask, and give tentative answers to, these very questions (Donald 1999; Parekh 2000; Amin 2002; Sandercock 2003). In terms of political philosophy, one might answer that in multicultural societies composed of many different cultures, each of which has different values and practices, and not all of which are entirely comprehensible or acceptable to each other, conflicts are inevitable. In the absence of a practice of intercultural dialogue, conflicts are insoluble except by the imposition of one culture's views on another. A society of cultural enclaves and de facto separatism is one in which different cultures do not know how to talk to each other, are not interested in each other's well-being, and assume that they have nothing to learn and nothing to gain from interaction. This becomes a problem for urban governance and for planning in cities where contact between different cultures is increasingly part of everyday urban life in the growing number of multiethnic neighbourhoods, in spite of the efforts of some groups to avoid 'cultural contamination' or ethnic mixture by fleeing to gated communities or so-called ethnic enclaves. A pragmatic argument, then, is that intercultural contact and interaction is a necessary condition for being able to address the inevitable conflicts that will arise in

multicultural societies. Another way of looking at the question of why intercultural encounters might be a good thing would start with the acknowledgement that different cultures represent different systems of meaning and versions of the good life. But each culture realizes only a limited range of human capacities and emotions and grasps only a part of the totality of human existence: it therefore ‘needs others to understand itself better, expand its intellectual and moral horizon, stretch its imagination and guard it against the obvious temptation to absolutize itself’ (Parekh 2000: 336–7). These are arguments that will be further developed in what follows.

### **James Donald: an ethical indifference**

In *Imagining the Modern City* (1999), Donald seems to take a less moralistic, less prescriptive, more pragmatic approach to the question of how we might live together. He is critical of the two most popular contemporary urban imaginings: the traditionalism of the New Urbanism (with its ideal of community firmly rooted in the past), and the cosmopolitanism of Richard Rogers, adviser to Tony Blair and author of a policy document advocating an urban renaissance, a revitalized and re-enchanted city (Urban Task Force 1999). What is missing from Rogers’ vision, according to Donald, is ‘any real sense of the city not only as a space of community or pleasurable encounters or self-creation, but also as the site of aggression, violence, and paranoia’ (Donald 1999: 135). Is it possible, he asks, to imagine change that acknowledges difference without falling into phobic utopianism, communitarian nostalgia or the disavowal of urban paranoia?

Echoing Iris Young (1990), Donald sets up a normative ideal of city life that acknowledges not only the necessary desire for the security of home, but also the inevitability of migration, change and conflict, and thus an ‘ethical need for an openness to unassimilated otherness’ (Donald 1999: 145). He argues that it is not possible to domesticate all traces of alterity and difference. ‘The problem with community is that usually its advocates are referring to some phantom of the past, projected onto some future utopia at the cost of disavowing the unhomely reality of living in the present’ (Donald 1999: 145). If we start from the reality of living in the present with strangers, then we might ask what kind of commonality might exist or be brought into being. Donald’s answer is ‘broad social participation in the never completed process of making meanings and creating values . . . an always emerging, negotiated common culture’ (Donald 1999: 151).

This process requires time and forbearance, not instant fixes. This is community redefined neither as identity nor as place but as a productive process of social interaction. Donald argues that we do not need to share cultural traditions with our neighbours in order to live alongside them, but we do need to be able to talk to them, while also accepting that they are and may remain strangers (as will we).

If this is the pragmatic urbanity that can make the violence of living together manageable, then urban politics would mean strangers working out how to live together. This is an appropriately *political* answer to Sennett's question of how multicultural societies might arrive at some workable notion of a common destiny, and foreshadows my later discussion of the importance of an agonistic democratic politics (Part 2). But when it comes to a thicker, more sociological description of this 'openness to unassimilable difference', the mundane, pragmatic skills of living in the city, sharing urban turf, neither Donald nor Sennett has much to say. Donald suggests:

reading the signs in the street; adapting to different ways of life right on your doorstep; learning tolerance and responsibility – or at least, as Simmel taught us, indifference – towards others and otherness; showing respect, or self-preservation, in not intruding on other people's space; picking up new rules when you migrate to a foreign city.

(Donald 1999: 167)

Donald seems to be contradicting himself here in retreating to a position of co-presence and indifference, having earlier advocated something more like an agonistic politics of broad social participation in the *never completed process* of making meanings and an *always emerging, negotiated common culture*. Surely this participation and negotiation in the interests of peaceful coexistence require something like daily habits of (perhaps quite banal) intercultural interaction in order to establish a basis for dialogue, which is difficult, if not impossible, without some pre-existing contact that can develop into trust. I now turn to Ash Amin for a discussion of how and where this daily interaction and negotiation of ethnic and other differences might be encouraged.

### **Ash Amin: a politics of local liveability**

Amin's *Ethnicity and the Multicultural City. Living with Diversity* (2002) is a self-described 'think piece' that uses the 2001 race riots in three northern British cities (Bradford, Burnley and Oldham) as a

springboard ‘to discuss what it takes to combat racism, live with difference and encourage mixture in a multicultural and multiethnic society’ (Amin 2002: 2). The dominant ethnic groups present in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham are Pakistani and Bangladeshi, of both recent and longer-term migrations. What this reflects is the twin and interdependent forces of postcolonialism and globalization, and these are Amin’s starting points. As several scholars have pointed out (Sassen 1996; Rocco 2000), the contemporary phenomena of immigration and ethnicity are constitutive of globalization and are reconfiguring the spaces of and social relations in cities in new ways. Cultures from all over the world are being de- and re-territorialized in global cities, whose neighbourhoods accordingly become ‘globalized localities’ (Albrow 1997: 51). The spaces created by the complex and multidimensional processes of globalization have become strategic sites for the formation of transnational identities and communities, as well as for new hybrid identities and complicated experiences and redefinitions of notions of ‘home’.

This is the context for Amin’s (2002) interpretative essay on the civil disturbances, which he sees as having both material and symbolic dimensions. He draws on ethnographic research to deepen understanding of both dimensions, as well as to assist in his argument for a focus on the everyday urban, ‘the daily negotiation of ethnic difference’. Ethnographic research in the UK on areas of significant racial antagonism has identified two types of neighbourhoods. The first are old white working-class areas in which successive waves of non-white immigration have been accompanied by continuing socio-economic deprivation and cultural and/or physical isolation ‘between white residents lamenting the loss of a golden ethnically undisturbed past, and non-whites claiming a right of place’ (Amin 2002: 5). The second are ‘white flight’ suburbs and estates that have become the refuge of an upwardly mobile working class and a fearful middle class disturbed by what they see as the replacement of a ‘homely white nation’ by foreign cultural contamination. Here, white supremacist values are activated to terrorize the few immigrants who try to settle there. The riots of 2001 displayed the processes at work in the first type of neighbourhood, but also the white fear and antagonism typical of the second type (Amin 2002: 2).

What is important to understand is that the cultural dynamics in these two types of neighbourhood are very different from those in other ethnically mixed cities and neighbourhoods where greater social and physical mobility, a local history of compromises, and a supportive

local institutional infrastructure have come to support co-habitation (see Albrow 1997). In the northern mill towns that are the subject of Amin's reflection, when the mills declined, white and non-white workers alike were unemployed. The largest employers soon became the public services, but discrimination kept most of these jobs for whites. Non-whites pooled resources and opened shops, takeaways and minicab businesses. There was intense competition for low-paid and precarious work. Economic uncertainty and related social deprivation has been a constant for over 20 years and 'a pathology of social rejection . . . reinforces family and communalist bonds' (Amin 2002: 4). Ethnic resentment has bred on this socio-economic deprivation and sense of desperation. It is in such areas that social cohesion and cultural interchange have failed.

What conclusions does Amin draw from this? For one thing, he argues against several currently popular policy fixes. One such fix is based on the belief that cultural and physical isolation lies at the heart of the disturbances, so the way forward must lie in greater ethnic mixing in housing at the neighbourhood scale (see Home Office 2001). Another popular policy fix in the urban literature looks to the powers of visibility and encounter between strangers in the open or public spaces of the city. The freedom to associate and mingle in cafés, parks, streets, shopping malls and squares (a feature of Richard Rogers' recipe for urban renaissance) has been linked to the development of an urban civic culture based on the freedom and pleasure of lingering, the serendipity of the chance encounter, and the public awareness that these are shared spaces. The depressing reality, Amin counters, is that far from being spaces where diversity is being negotiated, these spaces tend either to be territorialized by particular groups (whites, youth, skateboarders, Asian families) or they are spaces of transit, with very little contact between strangers. 'The city's public spaces are not natural servants of multicultural engagement' (Amin 2002: 11).

If ethnic mixture through housing cannot be engineered, and public space is not the site of meaningful multicultural encounter, how can fear and intolerance be challenged, how might residents begin to negotiate and come to terms with difference in the city? Amin argues that the contact spaces of housing estates and public places fall short of nurturing interethnic understanding, 'because they are not spaces of interdependence and habitual engagement' (Amin 2002: 12). He goes on to suggest that the sites for coming to terms with ethnic (and surely other) differences are the 'micro-publics' where dialogue and prosaic negotiations are compulsory, in sites such as the workplace, schools,



colleges, youth centres, sports clubs, community centres, neighbourhood houses and colleges of further education, in which people from different cultural backgrounds are thrown together in new settings which disrupt familiar patterns and create the possibility of initiating new attachments. Other sites include community gardens, child-care facilities, Neighbourhood Watch schemes, youth projects and the regeneration of derelict spaces. I provide just such an example (Sandercock 2003) in the Community Fire Station in the Handsworth neighbourhood of Birmingham, where white Britons are working alongside Asian and Afro-Caribbean Britons in a variety of projects for neighbourhood regeneration and improvement (the Collingwood Neighborhood House in Vancouver is another example of a successful site of intercultural interaction – see Dang 2002; Sandercock 2003). Part of what happens through such everyday contact is the overcoming of feelings of strangeness in the simple process of sharing tasks and comparing ways of doing things. But such initiatives will not automatically become sites of social inclusion. They also need organizational and discursive strategies that are designed to build a voice, to foster a sense of common benefit, to develop confidence among disempowered groups, and to arbitrate when disputes arise (Sandercock 2004b). The essential point is that ‘changes in attitude and behaviour spring from lived experiences’ (Amin 2002: 15).

The key policy implication from Amin’s work, then, is that the project of living with diversity needs to be worked at ‘in the city’s micro-publics of banal multicultures’ (Amin 2002: 13). Amin suggests a new vocabulary of local accommodation to difference – ‘a vocabulary of rights of presence, bridging difference, getting along’ (2002: 17). The achievement of these rights depends on a politics of active local citizenship, an agonistic politics (as sketched by Donald 1999 and Mouffe 2000) of broad social participation in the never completed process of making meanings, and an always emerging, contested and negotiated common culture.

The foregoing analysis of three reflections on multicultural urban coexistence offers a richer understanding of what a *social project of cosmopolitan urbanism* entails. It suggests a research and policy focus at the level of the neighbourhood, looking for and encouraging intercultural encounters and exchanges, inventing local institutions and designing public places that create the spaces for such interaction in the daily negotiations of difference that characterize urban life. Further, it is clear that merely creating spaces where intercultural

exchange is encouraged is not enough to guarantee social inclusion. Organizational and discursive strategies are also necessary in order to build voice, to foster a sense of solidarity across differences, to develop confidence among disempowered groups, and to mediate when disputes arise. A recognition that conflict is inevitable and ineradicable is a good place to begin thinking about a twenty-first-century cosmopolitan urbanism, which leads to the following discussion in Part 2 of cosmopolitan urbanism as a *political* (as well as sociological) project.

## Part 2: Cosmopolitan urbanism as a political project of intercultural coexistence

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In proposing cosmopolitan urbanism as a political project for the twenty-first century, my starting point is an acknowledgement of at least three fatal flaws of twentieth-century multiculturalism: as a state-based project (Mitchell 1996; Scott 1998; Sandercock 2004a); as an ethno- and racially based approach grounded in a static understanding of culture (Bisoondath 2002; Mahtani 2002); and as a product of racialized Western liberal democracies living in an as yet unresolved postcolonial condition that confounds the best of liberal intentions (Bannerji 1995, 2000; Hage 1998; Henry *et al.* 2000; Hill 2001). Space prevents me from repeating these critiques here, but my conclusion is not that we should abandon the multicultural project. Rather, it needs to be rethought. I agree with Stuart Hall (2000) that ‘the multicultural question’ is both a global and local terrain of political contestation with crucial implications for the West. We are inevitably implicated in the politics of multiculturalism: that is, the actual production of multiculturalism on the ground – which I think of as the spatiality and sociality of immigration – given that we live in an age of globalization and global migrations. Therefore, we need to find a way to publicly manifest the significance of cultural diversity, and to *debate the value* of various identities/differences: that is, to ask (as Chantal Mouffe does) which differences exist, but should not, and which do not exist, but should (Mouffe 2000). The concept of multiculturalism needs to be transformed in response to critiques of its fatal flaws, rather than abandoned. This leads me to define an *intercultural perspective* (or a cosmopolitan urbanism) as a political and philosophical basis for thinking about how to deal with the challenge of difference in the mongrel cities of the twenty-first century.

Let me suggest five necessary and interrelated components of an intercultural perspective: the dialectics of identity/difference; the centrality of conflict, or an agonistic democratic politics; the right to difference; the right to the city; and a shared commitment to political community (my thinking here has been inspired by Connolly 1991; Tully 1995; Mouffe 2000; and Parekh 2000).

### **The paradoxical dialectics of identity/difference**

We all grow up in a culturally structured world, are deeply shaped by it, and necessarily view the world from within a specific culture. The cultural embeddedness of humans would seem to be inescapable, and some form of cultural identity and belonging seems unavoidable. And yet we are capable of critically evaluating our own culture's beliefs and practices, and of understanding and appreciating, as well as criticizing, those of other cultures. We are capable of imagining and desiring cultural change. No culture is perfect or can be perfected, but all cultures have something to learn from and to contribute to others. Intercultural dialogue is thus a necessary component of cultural growth and development.

To some extent, one's own cultural identity is and will always be defined in relation to degrees of difference from others. And yet no culture is entirely static. Cultures are always evolving, dynamic and ultimately hybrid, containing multiple differences within themselves that destabilize rigid understandings of identity. And since diversity exists within as well as between cultures, no pure form of cultural identity is capable of being the foundation of membership in a political community. This implies the 'end of mainstream', in politico-cultural terms, and the birth of plurality, as the basis of political community.

### **An agonistic democratic politics**

In demographically multicultural societies and polities, conflicts over values and lifestyles, ways of being and ways of knowing, are unavoidable. As long as there is global movement of peoples and their accompanying cultural baggage, consensus will only ever be temporary, as each newcomer/group engages in the political arena in an attempt to redefine the society in its own image. An agonistic politics entails broad social participation in the never completed process of making meanings and creating values. An agonistic politics implies 'the end of mainstream' in terms of the end of a single dominant

culture in any polity, perpetual contestation over what is or might become common ground, and negotiation towards a sense of shared destiny. The quest for such common ground and shared destiny should not ordinarily subsume the right to difference, but that right is also a matter of political negotiation, a component of an agonistic politics.

### **The right to difference**

As a daily political practice interculturalism recognizes the right to difference, expressed as the legitimacy and specific needs of minority and subaltern cultures. However, the right to difference at the heart of cosmopolitan urbanism must be perpetually contested against other rights – human rights, for example – and redefined according to emerging considerations and values. The right to difference must always be tempered by the imperative of peaceful coexistence and the recognition of shared societal and global challenges such as ecological sustainability and social justice.

### **The right to the city**

In a world that will be predominantly urban by the middle of the twenty-first century, negotiating peaceful intercultural coexistence, block by block, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, will become a central preoccupation of citizens as well as urban professionals and politicians. The right to the city is the right of all residents to presence throughout the city, the right to inhabit and appropriate public space, and the right to participate as an equal in public affairs, to be engaged in debating and designing the future of the city and creating new intercultural spaces and built forms, and new ways of being together in the city.

### **A shared commitment to political community**

A sense of belonging in an intercultural society cannot be based on race, religion, ethnicity or any other such marker of identity/difference. Rather, that sense of belonging must be based on a shared commitment to political community, and specifically to a political community founded on the principles of an agonistic democratic politics. Such a political community remains perpetually open to redefinition as its membership changes, but there must be agreed-on procedures for debate and for resolving conflicts, and there must be legal and institutional protections against discrimination. A shared

commitment to a political community also requires an empowered citizenry, which in turn means addressing prevailing inequalities of political and economic power as well as developing new stories about and symbols of national and local identity and belonging.

There are (at least) two public goods embedded in an intercultural or cosmopolitan urbanism, based on these five components of a political philosophy. One is the critical freedom to question in thought, and challenge in practice, one's inherited cultural ways. The other is the recognition of the widely shared aspiration to belong to a culture and a place, and so to be at home in the world (Tully 1995). This sense of belonging would be lost if one's culture were excluded, or if it was imposed on everyone. But there can also be a sense of belonging that comes from being associated with other cultures, gaining in strength and compassion from accommodation among and interrelations with others, and it is important to recognize and nurture those spaces of accommodation and intermingling. This concept of interculturalism accepts the indispensability of group identity to human life (and therefore to politics), precisely because it is inseparable from belonging. But this acceptance needs to be complicated by an insistence, indeed a vigorous struggle against the idea that one's own group identity has a claim to intrinsic truth. If we can acknowledge a drive within ourselves, and within all of our particular cultures, to naturalize the identities given to us, we can simultaneously be vigilant about the danger implicit in this drive, which is the almost irresistible desire to impose one's identity, one's way of life, one's very definition of normality and of goodness, on others. Thus we arrive at a lived conception of identity/difference that recognizes itself as historically contingent and inherently relational; and a cultivation of a care for difference through strategies of critical detachment from the identities that constitute us (Connolly 1991; Tully 1995). In this intercultural imagination, the twin goods of belonging and of freedom can be made to support rather than oppose each other.

From an intercultural perspective, the good society does not commit itself to a particular vision of the good life and then ask how much diversity it can tolerate within the limits set by this vision. To do so would be to foreclose future societal development. Rather, an intercultural perspective advocates accepting the reality and desirability of cultural diversity and then structuring political life accordingly. At the very least, this political life must be dialogically and agonistically constituted. But the dialogue requires certain institutional preconditions, such as freedom of speech, participatory

public spaces, empowered citizens, agreed procedures and basic ethical norms, and the active policing of discriminatory practices. It also calls for ‘such essential political virtues as mutual respect and concern, tolerance, self-restraint, willingness to enter into unfamiliar worlds of thought, love of diversity, a mind open to new ideas and a heart open to others’ needs, and the ability to live with unresolved differences’ (Parekh 2000: 340).

Since commitment, or belonging, must be reciprocal, citizens will not feel these things unless their political community is also committed to them and makes them feel that they belong. Here’s the rub, then. An intercultural political community ‘cannot expect its members to develop a sense of belonging to it unless it equally values and cherishes them in all their diversity, and reflects this in its structure, policies, conduct of public affairs, self-understanding and self-definition’ (Parekh 2000: 342). It would be safe to say that no existing (self-described) multicultural society can yet claim to have achieved this state of affairs. But in recent years these issues have been identified, increasingly documented, and are becoming the focus of political activity in many countries (see Sandercock 2003).

Empirically speaking, the twenty-first century is indisputably the century of multicultural cities and societies. This means it will also inevitably be the century of struggle for interculturalism, and against fundamentalism, which is a belief in cultural (or religious) purity. A cosmopolitan urbanism then, or cosmopolis – to use an earlier term of mine (Sandercock 1998) – is a utopian social and political project for negotiating the socio-cultural transformations of human settlements in the coming age. It is a love song to our mongrel cities, rather than a war against them.

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