# What *culture* must be recognised in the politics of multiculturalism?

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Liberalism offers a very broad range of responses and theoretical constructions when it comes to addressing the issue of the cultural diversity of societies and their cultural management. Compare the responses of Charles Taylor, Clifford Geertz and Michael Ignatieff, to name three important thinkers. They all claim to defend liberalism, but their viewpoints are very different. Many other examples might be given, but I have chosen these three because they come from three different disciplinary fields: philosophy, empirical anthropology and political theory. My reason for choosing them is to show that their differences do not derive only from their different political sensibilities, from the position they adopt within the broad spectrum of liberalism, but also from theoretical options, one of which – and it is by no means the least important – is their concept of culture. In other words, how they imagine the function and dynamics of culture as a social whole, how they conceive the relations between the concept of culture and the concept of the nation, and also their conceptualisation of personal identity in relation to cultural identity.

I shall concentrate my comments on Charles Taylor because his book *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"*[1] largely determines the subsequent debate. Taylor sets out from the assumption that our group and our personal identity – with the stress firmly placed on the former because, as he sees it, the latter depends on it – is moulded by the recognition, non-recognition or misrecognition of us by others, with the result that misrecognition, or a complete absence of recognition, causes genuine harm because it wounds self-esteem, causes self-hatred and is therefore a form of oppression. Thus, recognition is a vital human need. For Taylor, however, this need has a historical genesis; it is not atemporal but the result of profound historical and cultural transformations that affect the shaping of a kind of subjectivity, of subjects' understanding of themselves, which is truly modern. The key concepts for understanding this change are those of dignity, authenticity, originality and dialogue. However, for

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1 Taylor, C. *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.

the purposes of addressing the aspect that I have indicated, I am especially interested in the two suppositions of authenticity and originality, as these are the ones that particularly involve the concept of culture.

The modern concept of **dignity** contrasts with the *ancien régime* concept of "honour". Characteristically, honour is based on a system of privileges, distinctions and exclusions which make subjects unequal by virtue of the inherited position that they occupy in a strongly stratified, hierarchical society. The republican state, however, replaced honour with the recognition of the fact that all citizens are of equal dignity. Thus it is a universal recognition of human dignity which can be discerned, via the Enlightenment and Kant, in the ability shared by all to direct their lives according to principles established independently by reason. However, this egalitarian recognition was intensified and acquired new meaning as a result of another factor that flourished at the dawning of modernity, the emergence of an individualised identity that each person discovers inside himself. Hence the modern ideal of being true to oneself, and the fact that this individualised identity is linked to the ideal of **authenticity**, an authenticity whose device is the subject's self-knowledge of a kind of interiority, a consultation with oneself to discern one's moral feelings and one's constitutive peculiarity.

However, this ideal of authenticity was reworked with another concept that did not come from the Enlightenment tradition, but from the German Romantic tradition, particularly from Herder: each individual has his own original way of being human. Thus the ideal of authenticity is now complicated by that of **originality**. Consequently, being true to myself, being authentic, means being true to an originality of mine that only I can discover. But there is something else of extraordinary importance here. Herder applied his concept of originality not only to individuals as persons, but also to nations as individuals. And, like people, a nation or *Volk* had to be true to itself, to its own *culture* (which at that point meant that Germans could not be second-class Frenchmen or quasi-Frenchmen, but had to know what it meant to be German and what the destiny of German culture was).

In fact – although Taylor does not stress this in his book – one might add to this genealogy the notions of *Esprit de la Nation*, which originated with Montesquieu, and *National Character*, which Hume discussed in the same period in a short essay, *Of National Characters* (1748), which was also influential. In chapter 4 of book XIX of *The Spirit of Laws* (1748), Montesquieu says that the *Esprit de la Nation* is formed by various factors: climate, religion, laws, maxims of government, precedents, mores (*mœurs*) and customs (*manières*). Thus the spirit

of the nation is produced by the interaction of physical and moral (social) causes. But Montesquieu's interest in this concept goes back to earlier stages of his work; in *De la politique* (1725), he affirmed the existence of a soul or character of society – considering it the result of an infinite sequence of causes – which, once formed, tended *to dominate society*. Montesquieu thought of these factors as being closely interrelated, so that a variation in one of them might lead to the rest being affected. If the spirit of the nation was altered, there was a risk that the nation might lose its original qualities. In his *Essai sur les causes* (1736–1743) he says that, except in very primitive societies where natural causes are dominant, moral causes are more important than physical causes. So that the development of civilisation entailed the increasing influence of religion, customs, laws and the legislator had to exert an influence on moral causes, minimising physical ones (climate), though without damaging the balance through which the spirit of the nation was formed. It was Hume, in his essay *Of National Characters* (1748), who gave definitive pre-eminence to moral causes. Hume also assumed that every nation had a set of **characteristic customs** that could be explained in relation to physical causes (climate) and moral causes (government, wealth, etc.). Montesquieu seems to have considered the primacy of the moral as opposed to the physical dimension on the basis of his correspondence with Hume.

Now, the concepts of *Esprit général de la nation* and *national character* both imply at least a homogeneous, integrated, unitary conception of something that may be predicated of all members of a nation. The same could be said of Herder. It was Herder who coined, or, at any rate, popularised, terms such as "national language" (*Nationalsprache*), "national history" (*Nationalgeschichte*), "national education" (*Nationalerziehung*) or "national traditions" (*Nationaltraditionen*). He never used the expression *Volksgeist*, however, but *Geist des Volkes* and *Geist der Nation* as well as *Nationalcharakter*.[2]

Taylor says that dignity, authenticity and originality acquire new meaning if we take the dialogical viewpoint into account. In other words: that the need for recognition appears in a different light if we consider that our life takes place in a system of languages (verbal, gestural, artistic, etc.) which is the system of our community and which already exists when we enter it, so that, as far as identity is concerned, it is always constructed in dialogue with others, with what they want to see in us, and often going counter to what others see or want to see in us.

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2  See Llobera, Josep R. *The God of Modernity*. Oxford: Berg, 1994, and Berlin, I. *The Roots of Romanticism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Therefore, the individualised identity that I am now discovering is the result of a negotiation through dialogue, with others outside and inside me.[3]

However, insofar as identity depends on an uninterrupted dialogue, a kind of negotiation between my interior and the exterior, what I would like to emphasise now is that, if there is a failure of recognition, it may damage identity. What comes to the foreground, therefore, is no longer the need for recognition, but the consideration of the conditions under which the attempt to be recognised may fail.

Taylor indicates two movements with regard to the recognition of identity, which are convergent in the universalist supposition, but divergent (and even conflictive) in the politics derived from it. On the one hand, the shift from honour to dignity brings universalist politics which emphasise the equal dignity of all citizens; they are "difference-blind" politics, because what they aim for is the equalisation of rights. On the other hand, there is the emergence of the politics of difference. Everyone must be recognised for his particular identity, which is unique though subordinate to the cultural community to which he belongs.

In the first case, what is recognised is a series of rights for all, leaving aside what differentiates citizens, whereas in the second movement what is sought is recognition of what makes them different, and this recognition is also made on behalf of the ideal of authenticity (in keeping with the characteristic contributed by Herder). Or, put more paradoxically, setting aside what is not universal violates the universalist principle of recognition (which takes the ideal of authenticity as a presumption).

This gives rise to the politico-cultural question of positive or reverse discrimination: there is a demand for privileged treatment of those cultural groups that, historically, have been disfavoured, so that their members may obtain competitive advantages over members of other, historically favoured, cultural communities. However, reverse discrimination may be understood in two ways: as a temporary and as a permanent measure. If one understands it as temporary, the aim is a levelling of the public sphere, so that, in the future, once inequalities have been remedied, it may be possible to apply the universalist politics of recognition which are difference-blind. If it is understood as a permanent policy, the aim is to preserve cultural differences for ever, with no return to an undifferenti-

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3   For instance, internalized parental figures, even though they may have disappeared physically; there is a constant echo of psychoanalysis here, which can also be seen in the bibliographical references that appear in his footnotes.

ated public space, safeguarding the identity – to which personal identity is as-sumed to be subsidiary – of "minority", "minoritised" or "subordinate" cultural formations (they have been, and are, described in all these ways and many more besides).

But there is a further aspect, also of extreme importance, which is important when considering the politics of recognition of cultural difference. In expound-ing the modern conception of recognition of the equal dignity of human beings, I have said that it could be formulated, in the manner of Kant, by saying that this dignity consists in the recognition of a potentiality in which all human beings participate: that of being rational agents capable of directing their lives in accor-dance with principles that reason itself establishes. This is a formal definition of dignity, based on characteristics devoid of any substantive content. In fact, the politics of recognition actually comprise the equal value of what has, in fact, been achieved in accordance with the exercising of that ability. We shall have to come back to this point, but we shall do so with reference to the community's cultural embodiments of those realisations.

Thus these two kinds of politics, which share both the ideal of authenticity and the concept of equal respect, come into conflict with each other. The **former** kind reproaches the latter for violating the principle of non-discrimination; the **latter** reproaches the former for denying the possibility of an undamaged identity when it constrains that which is different, forcing it into a unitary mould (which is not neutral from a cultural viewpoint), for difference-blind politics are simply the product of a particular culture which is established as dominant. Taylor goes on to contrast two models of what he calls "liberal society", and he clearly sides with one of them. Indeed, he says at one point that they are "two incompatible views of liberal society" (p. 94). And the view that Taylor defends happens to be based on a conception of culture that strikes me as very questionable, as we shall see.

Because of the protection of what Taylor calls the *right to survival* of a cul-tural community, he admits that "collective goals may require restrictions on the behaviour of individuals that may violate their rights" (p. 91). And so he admits that, even though individual rights may not have been infringed, "espousing collective goals on behalf of a national group can be thought to be inherently discriminatory" (ibid.). The reason is clear, for "it will always be the case that not all those living as citizens under a certain jurisdiction will belong to the na-tional group thus favoured". And the example that he puts forward, taken from Quebec legislation, is the prohibition that bars the children of French people and immigrants from sending their children to an English-speaking school; in other

words, French-speaking citizens are compelled to send their children to French-speaking schools.

Taylor acknowledges that this goes beyond the policies of bilingualism that Canada itself promotes. For, he says, "It is not just a matter of having the French language available for those who might choose it [...] But it also involves making sure that there is a community of people *here in the future* that will want to avail itself of the opportunity to use the French language." Or, put more crudely: "Policies aimed at survival *actively seek to create members of the community* [...] in their assuring that future generations continue to identify as French-speakers. There is no way that these policies could be seen as just providing a facility to *already existing* people" (p. 93).[4] That is why attitudes that defend policies which seek to "repair breakdowns of equality" (like those of Will Kymlicka) strike him as inadequate, because they are not designed to "ensure survival [of communities] through indefinite future generations" (p. 104, note 17). Consequently, Taylor criticises those who set individual rights above those of cultural communities. As is the case with Dworkin, when he says that a liberal society cannot adopt any substantive official conception of what is considered a good life, because it would involve a violation of the procedural commitment that obliges us to treat each other in an egalitarian, equitable way, irrespective of the substantive commitments of each individual, in modern societies that are characterised precisely by their remarkable diversity.

However, Taylor says that "*a society* with collective goals like Quebec's violates this model. It is axiomatic for Quebec *governments* that the survival and flourishing of French culture in Quebec is a good" (p. 93). Note the terminological oscillation and consequent ambiguity, which is not at all unimportant. For sometimes he speaks of "governments" and sometimes of "society". Yet this is not a trifling point, because governments come and go with an instability and transience quite different from the variety of beliefs that take root in the citizens of a society. Be that as it may, since for Taylor the French-speaking community's right to *survival* indicates two things: on the one hand, that, sometimes, the nature of the good that one wishes to preserve needs to be pursued in common, and therefore has to become a matter of public policy; and, on the other hand, that this does not necessarily imply a lack of respect for those individuals who do not share this definition of what is virtuous for life.

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4   My emphasis.

Now, Taylor thinks that these two aspects are compatible with the principles of a liberal society if one makes a distinction between fundamental rights and freedoms on the one hand, and privileges and immunities on the other. What a liberal society must do is guarantee fundamental rights (to life, liberty, trial by jury, freedom of expression, practice of religion, etc.): thus he distinguishes between "the fundamental liberties, those that should never be infringed" and "privileges and immunities that are important, but that can be revoked or restricted for reasons of public policy" (p. 93). To avoid violating the liberal model, therefore, the safeguarding of one's fundamental rights is sufficient. However, I think that this distinction can be highly problematic if one bears in mind that, as an example, he supports the measure which prevents immigrants and French-speakers from sending their children to English-speaking schools, all in order to ensure the future *survival* of the French-speaking cultural community.

Taylor's reflection follows on from a very specific case. His reflection is so specific that, from section IV onwards, his book proceeds as a case analysis of the political situation of Quebec and Canada; and Taylor declared in 1992, when the book was published, that Canada was on the brink of "impending break-up" as a result of not applying the policy of recognition; a diagnosis that now, fifteen years later, we may consider to have been mistaken. But the significant thing is not that diagnosis, but the arbitrary reduction that Taylor makes of Canada's social and cultural complexity. Because, having surreptitiously made an identification between "one language = one culture = one community", the problem is posed as if the issue in that state was the recognition of a minority culture by a majority culture. But the fact is that Canada – and Quebec – is permeated by a wealth of discontinuous economic, social and cultural fracture lines. That is precisely the starting point taken by Clifford Geertz when he considers how one should think of the political management of cultural diversity as it is configured in the world today.

It is certainly interesting to consider what kind of description precedes Geertz's conceptualisation.[5] He writes that Canada is an immense territory of tens of thousands of square kilometres, stretching from Detroit to the Arctic Circle, where French-Canadians abandoned by France after the triumph of the British in 1793 have lived alongside loyalists of the British Empire who fled the American Revolution, immigrants and fugitives from Europe and the USA and the inhabitants of Newfoundland, who, after their economic collapse as an

5   Geertz, C. *Available Light. Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics,* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.

autonomous Dominion in 1949, voted by a narrow margin to become a Canadian province. Canada has recently received waves of immigrants from the Asian Pacific, while a significant number of distinctly different Native American groups still survive. Ninety per cent of the population is concentrated into about three hundred kilometres of the frontier with the USA; half the population lives in the corridor between Toronto and Montreal, and a quarter lives in Quebec, where over 80% of the inhabitants are French-speaking. The rest of the population lives in the icy north, which is where most of the natural resources are located, but the area is so sparsely populated that there is a majority of Native American inhabitants in many places, as well as a different kind of French minority in New Brunswick; Inuit Eskimos in the north-east territories; Ukrainians, Asians and even more Native Americans in the west; those of mixed French-Indian stock, speaking a Creole that is a mixture of French and native languages in the forested central part, and a large quantity of English-speakers in Newfoundland. But Algonquin Indians and Inuit, taken together, also constitute the majority of the population in almost half the territory claimed by Quebec, and there have already been conflicts with these Native American populations concerning the control of natural resources in the soil and subsoil of the Indian territories. Geertz concludes that Canada as a country is more a field of (culturally supposed) "birthplaces", "relationships" or "breeds of people" than something that is one in itself, or a problematic coexistence of two opposing cultures, one of them lacking recognition.

Now, leaving aside the possible accuracy of this hasty empirical description of Canada, it is undoubtedly a better fit than the one assumed in Taylor's approach. Because what is crucial here is not Geertz's description in itself, but, as I have said, one of Taylor's fundamental conceptual assumptions which this description brings out in negative fashion: the concept of culture with which he works. It appears again when he addresses an issue rather different from cultural survival as a desirable substantive commitment of a liberal society. I am referring to his defence of recognising the "equal value" of different cultures, an issue that he considers at the end of his essay and also in "Comparison, History, Truth"[6]. For our purposes, the important thing is not the part that has to do with the need for comparison and the logic of intercultural understanding. With regard to this question, his point of view ranges from his reference to Gadamer's notion of a "fusion of horizons" to positions lying between those of the Wittgensteinians (such as Winch) and the Popperians (such as Horton and Jarvie) in the

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6    In: *Philosophical Arguments*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995.

discussions about the relativism of reasons, as in the arguments in the late sixties and throughout the seventies and eighties. The important thing, as I have established, is the concept of culture that he reveals.

When Taylor addresses the issue of the equal value of different cultures, he warns that he is not referring to "partial cultural milieux within a society" or "short phases of a major culture" (which would lead him to the paradox of thinking, for instance, that all artistic manifestations of a culture – such as ours – have equal value). No, he poses the question of equal value with regard to "all human cultures that have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time" (p. 98). At another point, he says that the cultures he assumes to have equal value are "cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning for *large* numbers of human beings, of diverse characters and temperaments, over a *long* period of time – that have, in other words, *articulated* their sense of the good, the holy, the admirable" (p. 101). He says of them that one must adopt the "presumption" that they have a value for all human beings. Now, here Taylor qualifies his point of view, for this presumption – which elsewhere he calls a "starting hypothesis" or even an "act of faith" – is *ex ante*. This means that it is not equivalent to a statement that all cultures certainly have equal value, but that they must not be discarded until one has proceeded to study them (he is referring to cultures that are sufficiently distant and different from what, at one point, he calls "Western" or even "North Atlantic" culture). The right on which one may insist is the *ex ante* presumption that every traditional culture has a value, but not that the study and possible consideration of that value will inevitably conclude with the judgement that it is greater than or equal to the value of the others.

Now, what I want to emphasise is that, in his statements about the need to guarantee the survival of cultural communities and in the question of the *ex ante* recognition of the "equal value" of different cultures, Taylor thinks of the notion of culture – to put it in Geertz's terms – as a fundamental *consensus* on goodness, beauty and truth; or, if you prefer, as a consensus on conceptions, feelings and values: an integral, configurative notion of cultural identity which conceives the various cultures as units without fissures, absolutely integrated totalities with precise, enduring boundaries, each of them a compact, homogeneous, simple, uniform unit. Every people, ethnic group or nation has "its" culture, but also a conception of cultural identity in which the individuals belonging to those entities are totally determined in their actions, with no margin for deviation or breaking away from the presumed consensus. What Geertz says is that, if this configurative conception of culture might have some plausibility in the context of the ethnology of the classical period (in which the objects of study were small, encapsulated, disconnected, illiterate societies – people dwelling in forests, on

islands and in deserts), then that concept of culture has now become crude and rudimentary, not serving to capture the cultural particularity and variety that is displayed nowadays and that is suggested, for instance, by his description of Canada.

The point is not that cultural diversity has disappeared, but that it can no longer be conceived as a set of windowless cultural monads that coexist along-side one another in a historically determined political space. In an advanced capitalist society, or in "liquid modernity" (to use Zygmunt Bauman's term), there are few individuals, if any, who do not pass through more than one com-munity "of ideas and principles" (as Siegfried Kracauer puts it),[7] communities which themselves, incidentally, vary between authentic and imagined, enduring and ephemeral. And that, Bauman says, is why the solution of the question of *sameness* (the consistency and continuity of our identity over time) is so hard and unstable. Consequently, the question of *selfness* (i.e., the coherence of what-ever distinguishes us as persons) is no less problematic, for at any given moment, synchronically, we do not belong to just one of those communities.[8] But we must also bear in mind the logic of personal and group cultural identity. From what has been said, the identity of individuals can be thought of by analogy to a jig-saw puzzle. However, there is an important difference. Whereas completing a jigsaw puzzle is a *goal*-oriented task (reconstructing a complete final image that we know beforehand), in the case of identity, the task is directed towards *ends*. We do not have a final image, but a series of items of very varied historical, cultural, social and political provenance with which "we do tests". As Bauman says, the problem is not so much one of recovering a community cultural identity that is presumed to be original or of making it survive, as of deciding what points of arrival are worth reaching. In brief: "We may say that the solving of jigsaw puzzles follows the logic of instrumental rationality (selecting the correct means to a given end); the construction of identity, on the other hand, is guided by the logic of *goal* rationality (finding out how attractive the ends are that can be achieved with the given means)".[9]

So we might reconsider *some* of the viewpoints expressed by Fredrik Barth in his famous 1969 book on ethnic groups and boundaries. Especially their cultural

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7   Kracauer, S. *The Mass Ornament. Weimar Essays*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Uni-versity Press, 1995.

8   Bauman, Z. *Identity. Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004, p.13.

9   Ibid., p. 49.

aspect: ceasing to consider groups of people as mere culture-bearing units. Also his conception that the cultural differences relevant for assigning individuals to collectives are not objective, that they do not depend on a medley of cultural features that the observer attributes to one community or another and then decides whether an individual shares them, but that the only relevant differences are the ones that *the actors* consider significant and use polemically and diacritically in any given time and context, in accordance with their interests, as opposed to the others.[10]

Now, this nomadic, contextual logic of the rationality of ends in the construction or definition of identities brings out an aspect already noted in Geertz's description of cultural variety, an aspect that questions the merely *culturalistic* focus of the politics of recognition as conceived by Taylor. For what also forms part of Geertz's description is the unequal distribution of economic resources among the various populations of Canada, or the conflicts for natural resources between Native Americans and French-speakers in Quebec.[11]

Indeed, as Bauman has said, "Identity sprouts on the graveyard of communities, but flourishes thanks to the promise of a resurrection of the dead".[12] According to him, those defunct communities, the search for whose identity is a "mere substitute", are not so much imagined as dreamed; they have always already existed, or they will exist in the future, but they are not at all like the ones that we really experience. The whole modern process put an end to them. The longing for identity belongs to the nostalgia for a dreamed-of past and the imagining of a reconciled future in which we will finally be what we are, or rather, "were", because those defunct communities are yearned for like a warm circle: a place providing a comfort that is due to the fact that its members are not strangers to one another, and to the goodwill shown when help is needed and aid given in times of poverty or peril. In short, a place where shared feeling promotes a prior understanding that embraces any subsequent disagreement and therefore makes its resolution possible. That welcoming warmth, therefore, is not a constructed

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10 See Barth, F., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1969, *passim*. But everything that depends on his consideration of small ethnic groups in traditional societies – Pashtun, Ethiopian, etc. – cannot be applied here.

11 I have summarized his description, but as it appears in Geertz's original text it includes the contradictions between the western provinces and Ontario, which provides half the gross domestic product, etc.

12 Bauman, Z. *Community. Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, p. 16.

consensus but something immediately given, tacit, experienced with familiarity and not deserving or lacking scrutiny, reflection or experiment. Such a community requires clearly determined boundaries; it must be small so that its members may be visible to one another; and self-sufficient, so that care and resources are available to all.

But modern societies are, in fact, characterised by an asymmetry in the distribution of care and resources. Moreover, general aspects of citizens' security for which the State had previously assumed responsibility are increasingly being left in the hands of the citizens themselves (in the words of Ulrich Beck, cited by Bauman, we are all required "to seek biographical solutions to systemic contradictions").

Therefore, the urgencies of identity and the consequent demand for recognition cannot be thought of in isolation from class fractures and considered as a merely cultural matter, an aspect that Taylor completely leaves aside. For individuals with resources, who have all aspects of security guaranteed, the identitarian backing of a stable cultural community is neither necessary nor urgent; moreover, it entails a long-term commitment which reduces the freedom of options that can be permitted. For individuals with scanty resources and all kinds of reduced circumstances, it is easy to think that belonging to a community with an "objective" basis will guarantee them a security that they are not guaranteed by a freedom of choice that they have never had. As Bauman says, citing Jeffrey Weeks: "The strongest sense of community is in fact likely to come from those groups who find the premises of their collective existence threatened, and who construct out of this a community of identity which provides a strong sense of resistance and empowerment. Seeming unable to control the social relations in which they find themselves, people shrink the world to the size of their communities, and act politically on that basis. The result, too often, is an obsessive particularism as a way of embracing or coping with contingency."[13]

But Rorty's opinion – subscribed to and accentuated by Bauman – was that this obsessive particularism not only rests on a misunderstanding of the difference and logic of cultural identity in the contemporary world, but that it is a decoy which distracts the dispossessed from their real objectives. For the new culturalist left, the main enemy is "a mental structure rather than a structure of economic relations"; "talking about money is in bad taste,"[14] Rorty says. So that,

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13  Bauman, Z. *Community*, op. cit., p. 100.
14  Rorty, R. *Achieving Our Country*, Harvard University Press, 1998, pp.79 ff.

for Bauman, a refusing of real individual material fragilities into the imagined power of a community results in "a conservative ideology and exclusivist pragmatics"[15] (a return to imaginary roots; others, collectively, are guilty of what happens to us collectively). The consequence is "that the pulverisation of public space and its saturation with intercommunal strife is precisely the kind of political 'superstructure' (or should we now call it 'substructure'?) that the new power hierarchy serviced by the strategy of disengagement needs [...] Global order needs a lot of local disorder 'to have nothing to fear'."[16] In *Identity* he goes so far as to declare categorically that "the war for social justice has therefore been short-changed into a plethora of battles for recognition".[17]

Michael Ignatieff has also underlined the importance of political and economic factors in the dynamics of cultural differences, in their creation and possibly violent configuration in communities (ethnic, national, etc.).[18] Ignatieff (who has also claimed to be a fervent defender of liberalism) reconsiders the concept of the "narcissism of minor differences" which Freud coined in *The Taboo of Virginity* (1917). Freud said that "It is precisely the minor differences in people who are otherwise alike that form the basis of feelings of strangeness and hostility between them"; perhaps this is the source of the hostility that fights against fraternal feelings in all human relations. However, in that first text, Freud was concerned about why male identity depends on converting woman into an object not so much of desire as of fear. Freud's answer was: "Perhaps this dread is based on the fact that woman is different from man, for ever incomprehensible and mysterious, strange and therefore apparently hostile. The man is afraid of being weakened by the woman, infected with her femininity and of then showing himself incapable." Freud returned to the concept of the "narcissism of minor differences" in *Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego* (1922), in which he went on to consider it in the context of differences of a group nature. What caught his attention was the fact that, even in the case of intimate groups – friendships, marriages, parent-child relationships – the effects are positive and negative at the same time, ambivalent. In other words: that which the members of the group have in common – as was seen in the case of men and women – does not always overcome the feeling of hostility. Freud thought that the same mechanism, or a similar one, could be observed in societies and between nations.

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15  Bauman, Z. *Community*, op. cit., p. 100.

16  Ibid., p. 105.

17  Bauman, Z. *Identity*, op. cit., p. 37.

18  Ignatieff, M. *The Warrior's Honor*, Toronto: Viking, 1997.

However, Ignatieff says that the degree of hostility, intolerance and even down-right violence between groups does not have a direct relationship with the magnitude of the cultural, historical and physical differences as perceived by an outside observer who is not involved with what is observed. So that the smaller the differences appear for that observer, the greater their importance may be for those who define themselves from within the confrontation. No cultural difference matters much until it becomes a privilege and a basis for attempting to legitimise oppression. So that "power is the vector that makes small things large", and in this dynamic small differences are emphasised and acquire great symbolic value. Indeed, violence magnifies minor differences, and in many cases the differences become violently aggressive in order to mask the fact that they are minor.

To conclude: the concept of culture that underlies Taylor's theory of multi-cultural recognition seems to me to be poorly formed and obsolete. Firstly, there is its inadvertent (and involuntary) assimilation of language and culture; as Quebec is his case analysis, the conclusions that he draws are marred by a desire for generality (one of the commonest mistakes of philosophers, according to Wittgenstein). Secondly, his configurative concept of culture (descended from Herder) does not succeed in taking account of cultural plurality and variety as it appears in modern societies. The consequence is that, thirdly, his notion of the subordination of personal cultural identity to community cultural identity is excessively rigid and deterministic, so that he does not consider other (political, social and economic) determinations as being at all relevant, not only for thinking about life in common but even when thinking about cultural differences.

Taylor upholds a model that he describes as being compatible with liberalism. Ignatieff, for his part, critically defends liberal institutions on the basis of the principle that we are first and foremost juridical subjects; first and foremost citizens with the same rights and obligations. This entails a historically achieved fiction which consists in leaving aside the multitude of differences that can be predicated of individuals, while accentuating that common determination: citizens who are subjects with equal rights. In principle, the classical liberal theorists understood "free individuals" to mean wealthy Christian white males. Consequently, the theory was a fiction that excluded women, children, and all non-white and non-Christian populations. But the liberal fiction has had the historical power gradually to incorporate those who, in principle, were excluded (women, "the poor", "blacks", and so on). This has involved long processes of struggle and making demands, but what was really being demanded was inclusion in the fiction. In other words, the excluded took over the language of liberalism, which is universalist, and used it against the original formulations of liberal ideas. The

process of integration of the excluded is coupled with the effect of separating the individual from the group with which he immediately identifies and being seen as conveying rights. So that, ultimately, he has been able to present demands to the State, and even to those groups of belonging through which he achieved his inclusion. However, all this rests on emphasising the primary role of human likeness and not the negation but the secondary nature of differences.

As for Bauman, who criticises Taylor on this point, following Habermas and coming close to Ignatieff in some aspects, he says that, if recognition of cultural variety is the right starting point, we must also agree that "the democratic constitutional state" is the only framework in which it is possible to conduct the debate on the human values that must be shared: "Universality of citizenship is the preliminary condition of all meaningful 'politics of recognition'. And, let me add, universality of humanity is the horizon by which all politics of recognition, to be meaningful, needs to orient itself."[19]

Geertz also claims a liberal stance for himself, adding the qualification of "social democrat", for he attaches importance to "the equitable distribution of life chances", and not just neutrality in matters of personal belief, individualism, emphasis on liberty and procedure, or the universality of human rights. But he does not want liberalism to consider as pathological, primitive, backward, regressive or irrational what he describes somewhere as "primordial loyalties".[20] He thinks that liberalism originated in a particular part of the world at a particular time, that it belongs to a tradition which sets out to be universalist, that it embraces a varied experience of how different people can live with a certain degree of respect, and that it must engage in discussion with other universalisms nurtured in other cultural and historical homes, especially Islam. The most that can be expected, he declares sceptically, is "a low-intensity peace" and "the moral obligation of hope".[21]

Allow me to introduce a touch of irony: one does not have to go to far-flung, exotic places to enjoy variety and difference; one has merely to listen to what liberals say.

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19 Bauman, Z. *Community*, op. cit., p. 140.

20 Geertz, C. "Primordial Loyalties and Standing Entities". Collegium Budapest/Institute for Advanced Study, *Public Lectures* no. 7, April 1994; also *Anthropological Reflections*, op. cit.

21 Ibid.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS