



## RESEARCH NOTE

### **Cultural Pluralism: An Overview of the Debate since the 60s**

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Ever since the 1960s, the cultural diversity of civil society has been the subject of public controversy, on account of pressures exerted by three forces of contestation, that are still active: feminism, nationalism and ethnic movements, in which the latter relates to immigrant minorities and black and aboriginal movements. What has followed has been a large-scale debate in political philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and political science, on the status of cultural differentiation in a modern political system. This text attempts to examine this debate through an analysis of the proposed responses to calls by these groups for genuine equality.

#### ***The Theoretical Positions***

Academic questioning concerning cultural differentiation has centered upon a critique of certain postulates of classical liberalism,<sup>1</sup> and, to a lesser degree, of the postulates of republican thinking, on account of political liberalism's openness towards the cultural diversity of civil society.

#### Political Liberalism

Classical liberalism does not envisage cultural homogeneity of a society as a possible reality, or as an objective of state power. It asserts that cultural diversity is inevitable, since the freedom of each individual to make decisions about his or her life creates infinite diversity. But since no link exists between humans, and there is no inherent will which compels them to live together, the risks of violence and inequality are permanent, and a compromise must be found in order for each person to accept some restraints upon the exercise of his or her liberty. The collective links that are possible in society can only be negotiated through recourse to reason, and through negotiation of the divergent interests and values; herein, each person must assess his or her actions and ideas with regards to reality: his or her point of view cannot be common law. If this negotiation is to intervene and persist, individuals must be well informed, and they must demonstrate virtue and moderation in their individual opinions and interests, and they must practice obedience to the law, tolerance and respect for the autonomy of others. Rawls (1993) speaks of *reasonableness*, in the sense of being both reasonable and just.

According to this vision, the state cannot intervene in the definition of common religious, moral and cultural values; it must remain neutral as regards specific values of individuals or groups. This principle, which is upheld by Nozick (1974), Dworkin (1981, 1985), Galston (1980, 1991) and Rawls (1993), implies a distinction between a sphere in which social and cultural differences can be expressed, and a sphere in which conflicts between rights can be resolved. The political (Mouffe 1993) is conceived of as the state, and it is instrumental; it serves freedom of choice, and individual difference. According to Walzer (1980: 24-9), it is purely administrative.

This conception, nevertheless, does not signify a will to eradicate differences of cultural orientation amongst individuals. Liberals do not negate the historical and cultural roots

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<sup>1</sup> The terms liberal and liberalism do not in any way refer to a theory of a minimal role for the state in the social or economic spheres, and they in no way convey the notion of economic neo-liberalism. They are employed in their historical and theoretical meanings, at their root more Anglo-Saxon than French. Historically, this version of classical liberalism did exist in France but when it was recuperated by the republican doctrine (Jaume 1997), or transformed by it (Gross 1997), it lost its original meaning.

of the individual; on the contrary, they see in the cultural plurality of civil society evidence of the respect for individual liberty. Their reasoning is the following (Holmes 1993): individuals have the capacity, the right, and even the responsibility, to judge, accept or refuse values, projects and norms of their social and cultural environment. Modernity is the possibility of individual emancipation from ties prescribed by custom or a majority group; it is the right to cultural dissidence as well as to political dissidence.

The liberal definition of the political constructs a form of societal belonging, deemed citizenship, as a form of egalitarian inclusion which accentuates both autonomy and security of all individuals from all forms of power. This protection leads to the formation of blatant inequalities, but these are considered less important and nefarious than despotism (Montesquieu 1750/1949-51). Beginning in the eighteenth century, the affirmation that liberties take precedence over equality is put into question.

### Republicanism

Republican thinking<sup>2</sup> adheres to the right of cultural and political dissidence, but it has two concerns: the passivity of citizens, and the predatory effects of liberty upon equality.<sup>3</sup> Representative democracy can generate an indifference to the public life, and a confiscation of power by a specialized body of bureaucrats and politicians. The morale of tolerance, which is the keystone of the liberal contract, may be absent, and the mechanisms of control exerted by elected officials and citizens may be insufficient. Given that humans are by their nature passionate, egotistical and disobedient, they may opt out of investing in societal life; the nefarious effects of this phenomenon upon state control and social equality must be counteracted. It is necessary to stir the adhesion of the citizens by inculcating in them a love for the collectivity of free individuals of which they are constituents. The central virtue in democracy is not the capacity to limit one's freedom to see it respected by others, but to place collective interests before personal interests and opinions, and to refuse corruption, demagoguery, authoritarianism and inequality. Love for the common good becomes the key to a civic morality that sees as a prerequisite the active participation in public life. But this love is not natural and humans must be transformed into citizens, educated by the institutions that incarnate their political communality.

Republicanism constructs citizenship as an active political behavior and a public morality which is a stranger to the reasoned liberal calculation aimed at imposing limits to individual desire and at assuring liberties and prosperity of every one. By insisting upon the unity and the egalitarianism of the political collectivity, republicanism tends to consider all divisions of the sovereign body of the people as noxious. Nevertheless, two major and persistent differences between French and Anglo-Saxon currents play an important role in cultural difference.

The Anglo-Saxon current considers that direct control over local affairs curbs the power of a strong state, and it sees in institutions of local management the instances and agents of education for the common good. In this idea is anchored the American federal structure of the republic, with its division into three powers. The French current, on the other hand, does not valorize local power, affirms the primacy of a strong, central state,

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<sup>2</sup> Mann (1987) explains the predominance of liberal or republican thinking through reference to the history of the formation of each democratic state, whereby there was violent armed struggle in countries in which republican currents dominate or remain, pacific and more politic in those dominated by liberal thinking.

<sup>3</sup> French revolutionaries considered that equality is socio-economic and not as primordial a right as liberty, since extreme poverty represents a privation of freedom. This antagonism between freedom and social equality is overcome through the notion of fraternity.



in direct association with its citizens, and makes public institutions – schools, public services, armed forces – the agents of civic education.

*Laïcité* is a fundamental component of French republicanism; it conceives of freedom of thought not as the right to believe in diverse religious values, but as the refusal of any idea of transcendence (Baubérot 1997; Nicolet 1982). Religion has been a source of conflict throughout modern history; it concerns the choice of curricula and the tasks of teachers during the Third Republic, the patriotism of Israelis at the turn of the 20th century, the status of private confessional schools and, for ten years now, Muslim organizations. This pattern is a product of history and philosophical heritage.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, the idea of divine transcendence does not run contrary to modern Anglo-Saxon thought: the British monarchy is Anglican, puritans often confound religious and civic freedoms (Pocock 1967, 1975, 1999), and oppressed religious minorities in the United Kingdom founded the first institutions of New England. Furthermore, there are many Christian Churches in England, the US and Canada, and both the American and the Canadian constitutions invoke God. The historical and sociological status of religious difference and the importance of local institutions for the Anglo-Saxon current have, therefore, an impact: the existence of culturally different communities does not run counter to popular sovereignty.

### **The Critics**

Liberalism and republicanism were strongly criticized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the fictional nature of the rights to equality and liberty, along with their effects upon domination, were denounced. There were workers' demands and insurrections, abolitionist and feminist contestations, and socialist and Marxist theorists. On account of their limited access to sources of knowledge and rationality, the working poor, women, emancipated Blacks and indigenous peoples were relegated to the universe of ignorance, passion and prejudice. The distinction between public and private spheres is thus a political creation, and the product of power struggles, no matter what level of naturalization it is subjected to. For example, despite them being said to be part of the so-called private domain, the rules of property and inheritance, or those norms that define relations between parents and child, were largely controlled by the state. The political nature of the demarcation between the public sphere, civil society and the private domain has haunted democratic regimes for almost two centuries. But other criticisms emerged and were amplified beginning in North America in the 1940s.

### Discrimination and Equal Rights

In the course of social interaction, individuals act out dissymmetrical and hierarchical distinctions that contravene codified rights, and produce inequalities. Black and feminist movements and writers in the 1950s<sup>5</sup> show how racism (Myrdal 1944; Park 1950; Moynihan 1965; Parsons and Clark 1965) and sexism assign inferior status and unequal chances for success in the workplace and on the political scene. Following the principle of equality, a person must be treated according to his/her individual merit. States created

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<sup>4</sup> The rigidity of social divisions, the monopoly of power by a monarch and his court, and the influence of religion, notably Catholicism, made the democratic regime dependent upon a strong popular mobilization and the destruction of institutions which intervene between the individual and the state (Turner 1990). The utopia of transforming the human through reason and science by Enlightenment figures (Rousseau and others, (Gross 1997) also had influence (Furet 1971, 1981).

<sup>5</sup> Demands for equal access to employment and housing were initiated by Blacks in the 1930s, while feminist movements organized and demanded recognition for household work and an end to the relegation of women to lower-paying jobs.

social rights after the Second World War to protect individuals from situations not depending upon their merit and their will (unemployment, old-age, illness). They also adopted laws against discrimination on the basis of sex, race, and national origin in the 60s.

But the Black and feminist movements in the United States, and the francophone movement in Canada, all reveal the illusory character of these measures in light of the intransigent nature of prejudice, and the historical lag-time that preceded the social and political efforts then under way. Programs of historical reparations or positive discrimination were adopted in the US, Canada,<sup>6</sup> the UK and the Netherlands to raise the level of equal access to public schooling and employment for linguistic or racial minorities.

#### Minority Cultural Orientation and Symbolic Inclusion

From 1950 to 1970, the debate centered upon socio-economic and political inequalities produced by cultural and racial stigmas, and upon their systemic character which seemed inscribed in the structure of occupations and political jobs and which did not seem to diminish even with a positive evolution of thinking about them. Beginning in the 1980s, the debate changed. Racial, linguistic, religious and ethnic discrimination were no longer the object of controversy about socioeconomic and political inequalities, but about the right to express minority cultural orientation without social prejudice and (since the 1990s) about their effects upon the sense of belonging to a society (Kymlicka and Norman 2000: Introduction).

It is then suggested that discrimination generates a failure of recognition of stigmatized persons as citizens, and that the so-called cultural neutrality of the state contributes to their negative symbolic delineation and to their alienation as regards state and society. This situation engenders affronts on the partiality of how history is told in the US and in Canada, and on the cultural and political status of immigrants in Western Europe subsequent to the near closing of borders in the 1970s.

The idea of cultural dominance grew in importance as well. According to Williams (1973, 1980), a dominant culture is the grouping of interpretations, rarely expressed and taken more or less for granted, which govern daily relations between people in the principle aspects of their social lives. Nevertheless, this culture is never hegemonic, since other representations of reality exist, which contest its legitimacy (Roseberry 1989; Thomas 1994) and open a space for conflict. In a modern system, equality is one of the values and ideas that create such a space by allowing us to point out contradictions between the ideal precept and the social reality (Rancière 1981, 1995; Scott 1985).<sup>7</sup> The terms *cultural minority* and *charter groups* are therefore used to make evident the possible existence of several cultural majorities constructed on the basis of different referents (cultural, linguistic, religious, sexual, race-related, national) in a single society. Given the evolution of the debate, control over cultural production as matrix of interpretation (school, media, historical narration), the equilibrium between fundamental freedoms and majority values, as well as state intervention, all become central questions.

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<sup>6</sup> In 1988, a program of reparations which consisted of individual financial indemnities was adopted in favor of descendents of Japanese immigrants interned in the US and Canada during the Second War on account of their ties to an enemy state (Iacovetta, Perrin and Principe 2000). Associations of Black Americans are presently demanding a symbolic indemnity as an admission of wrongdoing on the part of the US government during the period of slavery.

<sup>7</sup> Said (1978) did this same demonstration as regards Western colonial ideologies.



### Culture, an Inherent and Unalienable Link: The Communitarians

At the heart of the debate about cultural majorities and minorities, we also find communitarian criticism (Macintyre 1981; Lasch 1996) which accuses liberalism and republicanism of creating a disincarnated and supposedly rational individual. Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982) takes up this polemic in response to Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971), which explores the principal of justice in the US in light of Afro-American struggles.

The Communitarian school wants to evacuate the idea that the notion of rationality should be at the heart of the political contract. It considers that identity is built upon experience rather than deliberate, personal choices or strategies, and it refutes the idea according to which a person is by nature an autonomous, separated entity capable of actions and choices by itself. On the contrary, a person constructs himself or herself and becomes an individual entity uniquely in interaction with others, and his or her capacity to be particular must always be confirmed by others. Cultural inclusion, or inclusion in a particular milieu, influences in crucial ways a person's well-being, by procuring an array of values and referents with which he or she comes to identify, and by assuring him or her an uncontested collective belonging. This inclusion constitutes a primary element, like liberty, in the sense that it opens a space where the person can determine his or her own ends, and where he or she can find autonomy. Freedom is not a competence that one acquires at birth and applies to diverse realities, as Liberals and Republicans suggest, but a trait that is acquired in a living milieu. According to this approach, deemed the *social thesis*, social and cultural grounding of a person is necessary, constitutive, and unavoidable, and this rooting takes many different forms. As such, the idea of cultural neutrality of the state is defined as a myth that, in fact, reinforces the influence of cultural majorities. The state and the definition of citizenship cannot hold to the affirmation that cultural orientation is a choice that is solely a personal affair.

### Nation and Ethnocentrism

The notion of national culture could not escape the critique regarding the effects of cultural majorities. A national culture is said to be the sharing of an historical destiny, personal qualities, language(s), heroes, territory, and institutions (Anderson 1983; Smith 1991). As such it is criticized for being nothing less than an interpretation of the past and the present. In this regard, Williams (1961: 50-9) speaks of a 'selection of traditions'. This partial nature is pointed to in the 1980s, and, moreover, the 1990s, and its effects are described as the limiting, if not the outright restriction, of elected officials to those born in the country, and as the denial of recognition for new citizens as full-fledged members of a nation. This partial nature also leads to an erosion of immigrants' and national minorities' languages and cultures, their relegation to the status of second-class citizens, and their downright absence in the historical narration of society, all of which renders unstable, if not phony, the cultural neutrality of the modern state.

The range of possible interpretations of the US Constitution by the American Supreme Court as regards the separation of church and state, a clause included since 1791, often illustrates this argument. This separation can signify the prohibition of state preference for one church or another, or the interdiction in schools and courts of all symbols or practices relating to religious traditions which are portrayed as national (Christmas decorations, the recital of prayers, and so forth). In the first case, a general rule defines the scope of the law, in the second the interpretation takes into account the traditions of cultural majorities (Sullivan 1998).

## ***Ethnic and Immigrant Minorities***

### Liberal Responses

Liberal authors reply to criticisms by in fact attempting to legitimize the public policies adopted during the 1960s, notably the programs of affirmative action and the Canadian multiculturalism policy. The latter was introduced in 1971 with the objective of reversing the preponderant influence of the 'two founding groups', French and English Canadians, but, in fact, bypassed the Quebecois, immigrant and native groups' demands for a more equitable sharing of power. It enhances an image of Canada as a society unified by a political culture rooted in the respect of individual liberties and the equality of rights. It also describes Canada as an immigrant society which cultural composition constantly changed, and a society opposed to any idea of assimilation or cultural hierarchy (Helly 2000a, 2001).

### *Redistributive Justice versus Reparative Justice*

Inside the debates which ensued between Liberals and their critics, the programs of positive action played nary a role, notably in the university. It is within the logic of the social welfare state to accord compensation to all persons who suffer from a handicap and the controversies, especially in the US, focused upon the problem of how with limited state funds to deal with mounting claims from ethnic groups (Glazer 1983). Young (1989, 1990) is known for her response to this critique. She argued that only those persons who have undergone exclusion or social stigmatization in the name of cultural markers (Blacks, Hispanics, women, homosexuals, indigenous peoples) are eligible, and that it is easy to define these claims, and to refuse others made on the basis of simply cultural difference. But during the 1990s, despite the fact that affirmative action was applied and deemed useful in the United States (Bowen and Bok 1998), their egalitarian function was refuted and they were considered discriminatory by Euro-Americans.

### *The Right to Protection for Persons from Minority Cultures*

The question of recognition and public promotion for differences in individual cultural orientation is, on the other hand, the object of a debate which is far more acerbic and drawn out. For some, this debate seems to have ended at the end of the 1990s<sup>8</sup> (Kymlicka and Norman 2000), while for others it is far from over. Two well-known liberal philosophers, Berlin (2000) and Gray (2001) reject the postulate of the rational contract, based upon the idea of a consensus of everyone concerning the definition of the freedom of expression, and they affirm that each society has its own definition of this right. Gray recalls that Great Britain is not a theocratic state, but that there is a recognized right for schools to organize sessions on religion, which atheists can opt out of if they so desire. Such a distinction would violate the distinction between state and religion in the US, so does this suggest that Great Britain permits a greater freedom of religion than the US? Absolutely not, replies Gray, because each society has adopted a different point of view depending upon its history and its culture, and there is no reason to judge one superior to another.

Berlin argues that the disaccord as regards moral and cultural orientation in each society is constant and intractable, and that it is impossible to define which one is best for

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<sup>8</sup> Well-known opponents, like Glazer (1975, 1995, 1997) and Walzer (1983, 1995) were in the first instance hostile to the idea of a public recognition of minority cultural identity, but now accept it. For example, Glazer (1995: 10) suggests that when hispanophones in the US or francophones in Canada demand linguistic rights, they are asking for rights already acquired by anglophones.



society using the same criteria. It is, on the other hand, possible to be tolerant and to treat each person with respect, whatever difference exists between this person and others. It follows that for these authors, rights must constantly be negotiated on a case-by-case basis, and there is no stable policy in the matter, as would seem to be the case in the Canadian multicultural policy.

This policy and Article 27 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) often seem to be the optimal liberal answer in the matter of the protection of a minority culture, whatever their perverse, if not noxious effects and failures (Peter 1981; Moodley 1993; Day 2000; Pendakur 2000). This article guarantees the multicultural diversity of Canada to the point of making it an interpretive clause of individual rights. It imposes the obligation to interpret clauses of the Charter in such a manner as to assure the preservation and the promotion of the multicultural heritage of Canadians. It permits, for example, state financing of private ethnic schools that teach in an ancestral language as well as one of the two official languages of Canada.

The debate about political solutions is strong because, if the notion of involuntary, cumulated and historical disadvantage and the logic of the welfare state to increase its clientele lead to affirmative action programs, they do not allow as easily for the creation of positive cultural rights for minorities. According to liberal theory, personal cultural identity is a category which belongs to the private sphere, an approach which completely disavows the idea of identity as anchored within a milieu, a view promoted by communitarians and the majority of the movements which contest the predominance of cultural majorities.

But, starting in the 80s, several authors (Williams 1985; Nussbaum 1986; Raz 1986; Taylor 1992, 1994; Kymlicka 1989, 1995a, 1996; Kekes 1993; Renaut and Mercure 1999) have suggested that values and practices of cultural majorities threaten the autonomy of persons belonging to cultural minorities. It finds the ideas of liberalism and of public affirmation of cultural plurality compatible. Other authors, such as Boudon (1999) in France, do not refute the rights of minority cultures, but find that the emergence, or the so-called resurgence, of cultural identities does not rest upon a primordial need for identification with a lived culture, as suggested by the communitarian approach. Instead, it is the manifestation of utilitarian motivations that appear when universal values come up against the interests of minority or majority groups.

Others take a more radical stance. For example Okin (1979), Pateman (1988) and Young (1989, 1990) suggest that the precedence assigned to the values of a cultural majority is inherent in the idea of citizenship. All societies are dominated by one culture and the cultural neutrality of the state is nothing other than a lure or a form of incoherence. Young (1990: 102-3) suggests that 'reason cannot be unified', and that all affirmation of impartiality and universality of policies and practices are a fiction: 'Nobody can adopt a point of view that is totally exempt from the influences of a particular context and of convictions.' Day-to-day social life presupposes 'a plurality of moral subjects and of situations' characterized by a multiplicity of affiliations, of differences between groups, of needs, of desires, of particular perspectives and of passionate beliefs. Young puts forth the idea of a 'public heterogeneity' (ibid: 120) on the basis of two principles: 'No person, action or aspect of personal life should be relegated to the private domain, and no social institution or practice should be excluded a priori from the public discussion and refused public expression.'

Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (1989) ties the usual liberal response to demands of symbolic inclusion and to the communitarian critiques. All identity corresponds to engagements that form a frame, a horizon on the basis of which each person, case-by-case, determines what is good. An identity emerges from frames of reference, meaning, practices, interrelations, and ties to a milieu, and not to the decisions of an ahistorical, abstract individual, and all free individuals who affirm themselves do so in a socio-cultural milieu. Unquestionable values are anchored in this milieu, with two consequences. Individuals have the obligation to support the community or the society which make their affirmation of an identity possible, and the condition for living together in a society is their appropriation of narratives and elements which they consider primordial (moral, religion, family), and which can emerge from particular communities.

If citizenship is to be taken seriously, more than cultural identity, because it is at the core of democracy, then the recognition of the state demands an interest for, and a participation in, political and collective life. This interest is only possible if individuals identify with their country and feel some responsibility to it (Taylor 1996). Each person's sense of self-esteem depends upon the acceptance of his or her culture by society. If this does not happen, then the dignity or the self-respect of the person will be endangered, as seen in the case of Aboriginals and Quebecois in Canada or African Americans in the US (Taylor 1997: 25-6). In these conditions, the difficulties of maintaining minority social identity, as well as the reproduction of, and the respect for, socio-cultural milieus are of concern to the state. Minority identities must be recognized by the state, and justice must be done on behalf of individuals stigmatized and disadvantaged on the grounds of cultural markers. All hierarchy between cultures must be denounced.

Michael Walzer (1983) illustrates the conclusions drawn from these principles without going as far as defending a policy of multiculturalism. Cultural belonging cannot be allowed to pass unnoticed since all individuals are equal on the basis of a particularity: 'We are producers of culture; we make and we live in a universe of meaning' (314). The omission by the liberal political contract of experiences, attachments and values linked to a sense of belonging to a racial, cultural or religious group renders unreal the meaning of a life in community outside of the sharing of abstract qualities like rights and freedoms. Furthermore, private economic powers and the logic of the marketplace threaten rights and freedoms. Walzer criticizes the liberal thesis concerning equality, according to which each person benefits equally from goods because nothing, especially money, can be imposed upon society as a primordial good. He defends the application of different definitions of equality depending upon the area (workplace, school, culture), because to respect individuals as those who carry culture implies principles of justice elaborated on the basis of an understanding of what social goods mean to them. Nevertheless, since there is no possibility of determining a hierarchy in the cultural domain, justice cannot be rendered except through the respect of particular creations of individuals. As long as ethnic identity is a value for segments of the American population, the respect for it must be assured by the state through assistance to ethnic organizations, teaching the history of minorities, respect for each minority's special holidays, and aid to programs aimed at teaching ancestral languages.



### Republican Rejoinders

Policies of recognition and Walzer's concept of equality are contrary to the republican idea of the unity of the sovereign people, and the solutions to stigmatization, advanced by republicans, are based upon a reinforcement of anti-discriminatory legislation, a reactivation of democratic processes and an education on intercultural issues.

This current is primarily concerned with the dissolution of what political commonality means, the weakening of class antagonism since the 1970s, minority contestations which effect a slippage of the theme of equality towards that of difference, and cultural as well as economic globalization (Oldfield 1990; Barber 1996). It insists upon the political participation of each citizen as a way of confronting these challenges. Barber (1984) suggests that adhesion to the state and to society and a sense of common good could not be fomented solely through representative democracy; they can only appear in a relational context, deemed to be the only mode of creating empathy and a mutual spirit between citizens. Their most solid ground is in elected, local assemblies, small communities responsible for decisions concerning communal life. This local exercise of popular sovereignty permits the building of a sense of common life, and must be complemented by public civic education programs. Nevertheless, the models of this exercise, such as the Renaissance city-state, the Swiss canton, the Russian soviet and, moreover, the local assemblies of 18<sup>th</sup> century New England, remain examples for the exclusion of social categories which are culturally marked (women, Blacks, indigenous peoples, non-Protestants). Barber therefore recalls the need for state control over the respect of fundamental liberties by the local assemblies. But these assemblies form strong cultural majorities,<sup>9</sup> so the problem of the status of cultural minorities remains.

A French current questions the abstract character of the republican ideal, and wants to reconcile it with the expression of cultural difference (Touraine 1994, 1997; Wieviorka 1996). For Touraine, the central problem in democracy is to know how the social rules applicable to all persons and the diversity of cultural identities can be reconciled as a means of 'living together'. He suggests that we redefine the solidarity of the welfare state as the ensemble of institutional guaranties for each person to construct himself or herself as a subject by affirming both his or her freedom and the meaning of his or her life experiences. To be democratic, equality must signify the right to choose and to govern one's existence, the right of individuation against all pressures of social and cultural conformity and of a moralizing of behaviors and values. Democracy cannot be reduced to a collection of guaranties against authoritarian power and the conquest of civic and social rights, it must become cultural, the instrument of cultural communication, without becoming a policy of cultural pluralism. Public school must be a place for the formation of respect for cultural differences, toleration, and for the inter-cultural.

Wieviorka (1996) analyses the foundations of resistance and suspicions of the French political system as regards identity-based demands. He refuses to see the institutionalization of ethnic communities, but he considers that egalitarian values in France must be reactivated by parties and by unions. For others, the impossibility of making the 'republican crucible' work provokes the 'ethnization' of immigrants (Amselle 1996: 162) because since they can no longer refer to political collective references, individuals play upon the register of private identities. As such, the weakening of mechanisms for integration in Western states leads to attempts at 're-nationalizing'

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<sup>9</sup> See Kautz (1997, Chapter 5) for a criticism of Barber's notion of democratic communal dialogue.

societies for which the 'ethnicization' of immigrants and the attention paid to cultural orientations are but manifestations.

As regards the republican current in France, it is also important to note that despite a discursive opposition to institutionalized cultural pluralism, the state has kept abreast of the sociological reality and minority pressures ever since the 1980s. Public funds are accorded to immigrant associations if they show a social vocation, especially in deprived neighborhoods, and programs of positive action based upon criteria of income and place of residence were adopted to improve the condition of immigrants.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, since 2000, political parties have found themselves legally obliged to present female candidates for election.<sup>11</sup>

### ***The Nation and National Belonging***

The current debate about nation and nationalism raises several questions. They are the confusion between citizenship and nationality in modern states, the dissolution of nationalism (deemed grand or official nationalism) as a result of multiple factors acting since the 1970s, the status of national minorities, and the idea of the national culture as a personal and collective good.

#### Official Nationalism

The idea of the fragility of modern democracy as foundation for a collective identification is at the heart of questions about national sentiment. For Schnapper (1994), for example, if it is true that different collective experiences and memories exist within a single society, only a sense of belonging anchored in the memory of a secular history, as well as particular public institutions, will permit to assure a sense of commonality in a society. This idea is not new; important sociologists linked social stability and nationalism (Durkheim 1957; Tönnies 1887/1957; Mauss 1968-9), while Montesquieu, Smith and Tocqueville considered that being attached to the monarchist state or to a dominant religious belief were both stimulants for democratic consolidation (Rothschild 2001). This sense of attachment reduces conflicts of value, in their opinion, and gives rise to a sense of loyalty that is so central to the continuity of the state.

The modern state is characterized by an inherent tension between its cultural foundation in a specific society, it being formed on a particular territory and its universalistic principle. The state exercises its sovereignty by integrating the population of a given territory, and by affirming itself as an 'historical subject in the world order, founded upon relations between political nation-units' (Schnapper 1994: 28). It creates a discourse about its inscription upon this territory, and it defines the population that participates in its particular common judicial and political space (ibid: 195). This international inscription and the necessity of creating an identity dimension and of instituting practices which account for its social and political heritage come up against the principle of abstract rationality of the modern state, as well as its regulating idea of universalism. The idea of shared (institutional, national, religious or linguistic) experiences of its members then constitutes a complement to its abstract definition of the political identity (Freitag 1981; Schnapper 1994; Harp 1998; Bourque, Duchastel et Pineault 1999).

The ideas of universalistic citizenship and societal specificity give rise to the debate about the illusory distinction between ethnic and civic nation. Some authors suggest the distinction between civic nationalism, deemed to be positive, like French, British, Dutch,

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<sup>10</sup> Including ZEPs, Zones of Education Priorities, for deprived populations.

<sup>11</sup> In order to avoid the adoption of quotas for women in the National Assembly.



Greek, Swiss, Canadian, American, and romantic or ethno-cultural nationalism, such as Asian, German, Central European and Eastern (Seton-Watson 1965; Kohn 1944; Brubaker 1989; Ignatieff 1994). A more fundamental question has to be asked: 'How is it possible to preserve universalism and recognize the legitimacy of solidarity between citizens who share the same public space, and a common imaginary, and evade the possibility that the "we" degenerates into ethnic isolation?' (Birnbaum 1997: 33, my translation).

History teaches us that the superposition of culture, ethnicity and state take shape in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and subsequently develop. Gellner, describing the formation of nationalisms in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, explains that the particular mode by which capitalism was implanted in each country exposed persons to relative similitude in terms of socialization and experience, producing a relative cultural homogenization and the sense of belonging to a territorial entity. Deutsch (1953) insisted upon the multiplication of communications that reinforces the image of a unified territory. Other authors illustrate how, during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, states concerned with economic issues promoted equivalence between public institutions, national interests and territories. Then, beginning in the 1860s, an equivalence between individual qualities, a language, a secular history, blood-ties, and territory was constructed (Hobsbawm 1983; 1990),<sup>12</sup> notably through public schools which grew during that period (Green 1990; Harp 1998; Heathorn 2000). This equivalence was explained or enhanced by writers and historians as some recent writings have illustrated (Hroch 1985, 1995; Agulhon 1989; Nora 1992; Colley 1992; Thiesse 1999). Citizenship and nationality were superposed, a good citizen became a patriot, and nationalisms flourished, before other factors intervened. Voting rights were expanded under pressure from the 'popular classes' which were being integrated into political life (Carr 1945); urbanization and industrialization accelerated and provoked concerns about social disorder and degeneration,<sup>13</sup> an idea central to the genesis of discourses about the particular qualities of nationals.

Since then, several factors and evolutions seem to have reduced the so-called common national experience and the socialization into the nation. We could think of the Marxist and socialist critiques, the human hecatomb of the Great War, the Nazi regime, the consolidation of the welfare state, the division of the world into two ideological blocs, the differentiation of lifestyles, the rise of identity-based demands and individualism, and cultural and economic globalization. But even if these facts did de-legitimize the idea of a genealogical or biological form of the state, which is now only supported by extreme right movements, they did not reduce its ethno-cultural and historicizing foundation. Studies (Perrineau 1994; Mayer 1997; Duchesne 1997; Bréchon *et al.* 2000; Helly and van Schendel 2001) illustrate how strong national sentiment can remain, supported by the idea of cultural and historical specificities such as similar qualities of a population historically established on the same territory, popular or scholarly patrimony. It is true that a new form of nationalism appears which makes room for the invocation of other specificities, such as social, cultural and economic politics of a state, its political regime and its place on the world stage. But the debate about national sentiment remains open, all the more because its forms in the context of globalization and the multiplication of international forms of regulation are not studied.

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<sup>12</sup> For an overview of this and earlier evolutions, see Helly (1997).

<sup>13</sup> The spread of social Darwinism, which presented the superiority of certain individuals and groups as reasons for their permanence and on-going influence, played a role at this time, as did the economic and military superiority of Germany. These facts contributed to the definition of national groups on the basis of particular qualities, as well as the importance accorded to education.

### Minority Nations

Demands for the sharing of powers, and, moreover, for secession, by national minorities provoked the reflection of liberal authors (Tamir 1993; Buchanan 1991, 1995; Miller 1995; Kymlicka 1995b; Aughey 2001) on two points: the legitimacy of nationalism as defense of a culture and the legitimacy of secession. Following the social thesis, they suggest that the national community, like any other cultural community, constitutes a milieu and a common good, without which their members' choices would be but actions without continuity or coherence. The bestowing of political means for preserving this common good is but the equivalency of means which official nationalisms have resorted to since the 19<sup>th</sup> century in order to affirm themselves. Nootens (1999: 390) for example writes: 'Nationalist arguments based upon the will of a people to assure the survival and flowering of its culture, as well as the control of its destiny, can express reclamations which found moral arguments and legitimate intervention in political decisions. In fact, the nature of national belonging is such that its expression cannot be relegated to the private life of citizens; to be significant, to have meaning, it must be able to express itself in common life and common institutions' (my translation).

Going beyond the ethnic and genealogical definition of nation, Kymlicka (1995a) coins the idea of 'societal culture', to designate the 'means for significant living for its members in all spheres of their activities', including social, educational, legal, economic, religious, public and private activities (ibid: 76). He adds that in the modern world, where there is pressure for the creation of one common culture for each country, the same culture must contain political institutions that permit its reproduction (ibid: 80). Accordingly, the culture of a national minority is a form of life in society; it constitutes a product of history and of the representation that a particular group makes of itself, and it can be transformed to include persons from other cultural horizons.

The second question this raises bears upon the concrete political means needed to assure the vitality of a national minority. Is this governmental autonomy or the formation of a new state? The liberal practice permits that governmental autonomy is granted,<sup>14</sup> but it is unable to answer demands for political secession. It can but allow for such a demand or revert to repression (Moore 1998, 2000).<sup>15</sup>

Walzer is of the opinion that the system of governmental autonomy is sufficient to assure the respect for and the reproduction of the culture of a national minority, and Taylor (1997: 29-30) suggests, as regards Quebec nationalism, that Canadian federalism remains a valid mode of operating. The multicultural approach permits the multiplicity of narratives and 'has the advantage of putting things in common, and of creating a space which is more open to complex identities, since it is itself a complex (multiple) identity. One can be Canadian and Québécois, Manitoban and Canadian, because these are not

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<sup>14</sup> Liberals defend governmental autonomy when colonial or democratic states were imposed or founded in societies including several institutionalized communities. Tocqueville valorized the system of British indirect rule in French Canada for this very reason. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the case of Puerto Rico and, more recently, of Catalonia, the Basque region in Spain or Scotland, all illustrate this solution. The liberal practice also accords control and public financing of certain institutions (pillar system in Holland and Belgium, the confederation in Switzerland; Crouch 1986; Jamart 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Another way of recognizing communities of different language or culture was proposed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Habsburg monarchy in the face of upheavals, and of the influence of the liberal thesis which proposed one-language-one-culture-one-state. This mode, called personal autonomy, permits the regrouping of people who wish to maintain their cultural affinities through institutions not linked to a territory and financed by the state. It was one of the demands of the Hungarian delegation at the end of WWI, but it was turned down, on account of the desire on the part of the Great Powers to dismantle the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires (Pierré-Caps 1995; Sabourin 1996; Hermet 1997).



different identities, they are simply identities which are structured differently (language, history)'. All the same, if this definition does not satisfy the majority, or forgotten minorities, then it is necessary to face up to either a federal a-symmetric system, or to give in to secession. Other liberal authors propose the first option (Kymlicka 1995b; Webber 1994).

Buchanan (1995) exposes legitimate situations in which secession could occur: the recovery of a historically occupied territory which was taken by force; a clear socio-economic inequality effected through taxation, or through politics which disadvantage a national minority. On the other hand, resorting to secession as a means of preserving a culture is not acceptable unless several proofs exist to justify it (ibid: 355-364). Culture, and the material basis<sup>16</sup> of the institutions which support it, are in danger; they constitute a contribution to, or an enrichment of, lives of individuals and they do not in any way impinge upon their rights and liberties, or on those of others. Buchanan suggests that all racist, hateful or illiberal culture must be eliminated. The final conditions are that the territory of the future sovereign state must be economically viable, and the state that finds itself divided, or all other state or population have no valid right upon this territory. But since there is not any international tribunals or any clause in existing constitutions that could regulate the validity of proofs, Buchanan can but speak of a morality of secession.

Other authors defend another solution; the state must become multinational and not simply 'consociations' (Resnick 1994; Gagnon and Rocher 1997; Bourque and Duchastel 2000). In Canada, this solution implies the sharing, amongst Québécois and also some sixty native nations, of powers relating to the organization of collective life (Royal Commission 1996), as well as an alliance with the federal state in matters of money and international politics.

### ***The Counter-Critiques***

#### Individual and Collective Rights

According to the liberal argument (Barber 1996), the creation of particular cultural rights contravenes the symmetry of rights and invites the formation of closed communities. This argument is countered by Young (1989) and Kymlicka (1995a), since rights regarding the respect for minority cultural orientation concern persons and not groups. Further, given the precept of respect for individual liberties, this right cannot generate any enclave foreign to the state and to society in general. In fact, individual cultural rights do not allow for collective institutions such as schools and tribunals that could assure an effective communal closing-off, nor is the right to constrain others accorded (Helly 2001). In Canada, for example, all leaders of ethnic institutions financed by the state must respect the precepts of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Liberties in order to be elected. Important values of the majority are guaranteed.

Indeed, if it assures an equality of public status for religions<sup>17</sup> and the right to an education in non-official languages, Article 27 of the Canadian Charter of Rights does not annul the predominance of the two official languages of Canada, English and French, nor

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<sup>16</sup> Buchanan (1995: 357) offers the example of the extermination of herds of bison, which eliminated all chance that American indigenous peoples could maintain their way of life.

<sup>17</sup> For example, authorization given to Sikh RCMP officers, or to Muslims wishing to wear headdress at school, the annulling, in Ontario, of mandatory store-closings on Saturday, on account of it contravening the freedom of conscience and religion; the abolition of rules permitting religious exercises in public schools.

the protected status of Catholicism and Protestantism. The only granted collective right is the right to impose French as official language in Quebec.

The suspicion of some authors, especially French, as regards community belonging is based upon the idea that it corresponds to a regression, and to a second-rate meaning of state belonging which finds itself in the hold of intra-national, communitarian, and supra-national imaginaries in Europe. This idea of an incompatibility between minority and citizenship identities is criticized in writings showing that the sense of belonging to a cultural minority does not generate an indifference to public life or a retreat in closed and authoritarian communities. On the contrary, it supports a strong adherence to the individualist ideology and a strong link to the state (Whitaker 1992; Kymlicka 1998; Mendelsohn 1999; Helly and van Schendel 2001). Non-acceptance in the established society favors identification among immigrants with transnational and home country communities (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992; Basch, et al. 1994).

#### Balkanization and Cultural Relativism

According to a more cultural-based criticism, and to ultra-liberal commentators in Canada and the US around the 1990s, not only do rights aimed at protecting a minority culture not reduce the negative markings of the group (Bissoondath 1994), they create a balkanization. According to this argument, society is an organic set for which cohesion must be preserved through the affirmation of the predominance of existing similarities between members rather than respect for their differences, as well as the affirmation of the natural character of inequality and competition between individuals. The sharing of individualist values, of an historical collective heritage and of a little-defined social conformity, will constitute the social cement. All special treatment accorded by the state in the name of cultural and historical difference will destroy the unity that is sought, creating a host of differences and raising the specter of social fragmentation and divisive struggle (Bibby 1990; Schlesinger 1992; Ungerleider 1992; Bernstein 1994).

The other side of this argumentation is that cultural pluralism leads to an absolute and chaotic cultural relativism. But, according to Gellner (1992) there exists in Occidental societies a hierarchy of cultural forms, since the technological rationality surpasses all other cultural logic, and to think that constructions of meaning come to be made equivalent is to miss the importance of this hierarchy.

#### The Illusory Coding of Cultural Plurality

Post-modern authors point to the relativity of national messages, and of ways of living, on account of the logic of the marketplace, the reinforcing of individualism, the variation in lifestyles, and the ideology of interiority and of communication. According to their view, these evolutions show the falseness of any unitary idea of living together. And they transform the control of discourses and symbols into a central political stake as discourses determine social places as much as the marketplace (Lyotard 1971, 1979; Baudrillard 1985; Turner 1990b, 1993, 1994; Jameson 1991; Featherstone 1988, 1990; Heelas et al. 1995; Day 2000). From here, all control exerted by the state upon this evolution only reifies identities and avoids thinking about alterity. It codifies a particular form of cultural plurality in a society, and creates a new illusion of commonality and social unity (Day 2000).

#### **Conclusion: The Present Context**

The debate on the status of cultural pluralism and personal or collective identities in democratic states is inscribed within the four-pronged issues of universalism, equality,



national ties and citizenship as an exercise of rights. It participates in a critique of the welfare state, but it reproduces its logic of multiple creation of clienteles, which Marshall (1950) foresaw after the Second World War. In this, it seems to be a few years late, in light of the transformation of the welfare state during the 1990s. A new paradigm is hereby affirmed, which links citizenship as consciousness of obligations as regards others, active participation in the resolution of tensions and social problems, individual merit and performance, and 'social cohesion' (Helly 1999, 2000b). It affirms that 'social cohesion' grows out of cooperation between individuals and constitutes a source of social peace, equality and a sense of social belonging. It suggests that this cohesion is eroded by the decline of civic life, of political interest, of social solidarity, and an absence of any sense of social obligations on the part of individuals. This affirmation, presented with force in studies by Putnam (1993, 2000), is contested (Sabetti 2000; Forsé 2001), but it does support a public discourse throughout the developed world (Thomas 1997; Jenson 1998). This discourse insists upon two points even as it points to the effects of poverty and social disqualification: the need to re-create links between citizens, and to provide a meaning to the idea of living together. To achieve these two objectives, it maintains that the implication of each person in the management of collective affairs, notably locally, must be active.

This transformation induces a new conception of public policies. More attention is paid to their execution, their flexibility, their ability to react, and their adaptability; the enunciation of simple, durable rules is no longer privileged, and more importance is given to measures adapted to precise social situations and to public management efficiency. What follows are two new objectives and approaches for public intervention.

The importance accorded to the social and economic performance of individuals induces a new fragmentation and selection of state clienteles, which leads to programs of social protection which are less and less inspired by universalist logic, except in Scandinavian countries. Attention is paid to 'risk groups' that are defined by crossing failings in social insertion for reasons of cultural status or race to factors such as performance in school, family situation, gender, reliance upon social security or unemployment, age, drop-out levels, juvenile delinquency or area of residence. A larger delegation to NGOs of the management of social problems is in operation, at the same time as an extension of consultations with organisms of civil society and the adoption of programs aimed at the participation of residents in the resolution of social problems.<sup>18</sup>

Getting certain groups to catch up, after having been excluded or marginalized by the workplace, is the order of the day, rather than the question of sociological or political status of cultural differences. We could ask how the weaknesses of policies or measures aimed at the elimination of racism and cultural discrimination will be debated and considered publicly, especially when the new political mindset tends to alienate the autonomy and creativity of organisms which emerge from civil society. In this context alone, the effects of discrimination upon a difficult or impossible insertion into the workplace will demand attention. We find ourselves back in a situation that resembles the 1960s, with the difference that now the movements that fight racism and ethnocentrism are absent, and an eventual mobilization of the people affected is reduced by the fragmentation of their clientele in a highly differentiated state.

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<sup>18</sup> For example, the reformulation of the *Politiques de la Ville* in France, first adopted in 1981, the new programs put into place in the UK (Power 1997), and the new objectives of Multiculturalism Canada since 1995 (Helly 2000, 2001).

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