

# Is multiculturalism the solution?

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## Abstract

As far as multiculturalism is at stake, three kinds of question arise at the more or less confusing meeting point of sociology, political science and political philosophy: What are the sources and meanings of cultural difference in our societies? In what way do institutions and policy-makers in some countries deal with multiculturalism? Why should we favour or not favour multiculturalism? This article tackles these questions in turn and seeks to answer them. Cultural differences are not only reproduced, they are in the constant process of being produced which means that fragmentation and recomposition are a permanent probability. In such a situation, the problem is how to broaden democracy in order to avoid at one and the same time the tyranny of the majority and the tyranny of the minorities.

**Keywords:** Multiculturalism; cultural differences; fragmentation; democracy; subject.

## I. A recent concept

The use of the noun 'multiculturalism' and its adjective 'multiculturalist' is so recent that there is some hesitation in conferring a precise meaning to the terms. To our knowledge, they are not encountered before their launch in Canada at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s.<sup>1</sup> At most, in both the political and social science literature, in particular with reference to Africa, we find the use of the adjective 'multicultural', including its appearance sometimes in the title of an article or book (for example, Richards 1969), with the idea of giving a descriptive account of a society or state.

Multiculturalism only appears in dictionaries, or in library classifications, much later. The *Harper Collins Dictionary of Sociology* (1991) gives the following definition:

Multiculturalism – the acknowledgement and promotion of cultural pluralism as a feature of many societies (.....) multiculturalism celebrates and seeks to protect cultural variety, for example, minority languages. At the same time it focuses on the often unequal relationship of minority to mainstream cultures.

It appears in 1990 in the Washington Library of Congress classification with the definition: 'The condition in which ethnic, religious or cultural groups coexist within one society'. In France, *Le Petit Robert* notes in 1985 that its first appearance dates from 1971 and proposes to define it as the '*coexistence de plusieurs cultures dans un même pays*' (the coexistence of several cultures in one country); it is found in *Le Grand Larousse* from 1984 on, but not in the 1994 edition of the *Dictionnaire Bordas*. Nor is it included in the *Dictionnaire de notre temps* (Hachette, 1990) or in the 1995 edition of the *Encyclopédie Universalis*. However, it is included in the classification of the Institut d'Etudes Politiques [IEP] library in Paris.

If multiculturalism is a recent term in dictionaries and classifications, it has only recently entered into everyday use, particularly in the press. Nathan Glazer observed in a colloquy in 1996 that he knew of forty occurrences of the word in the major American newspapers in 1981, and 2,000 in 1992 (Glazer 1996).<sup>2</sup>

Finally, the relative confusion associated with the term, which is such that numerous authors refuse to use it (Benhabib 1996, p. 17),<sup>3</sup> is due to the existence of a related and, to some extent, a competing vocabulary which in some cases appears to be almost interchangeable. The concept of cultural pluralism, for example, as defined in the Dalloz (1981) *Lexique des sciences sociales* is not very far from that of multiculturalism: 'It is a characteristic of societies in which there are cultural and social differences in relation to the unicity of the mainstream, even in the complexity, of archaic societies'. Similarly, the concept of '*interculturalisme*' which is ever present in the discussions in Quebec, or, again, that of 'pluriculturalism', may to some extent overlap with that of multiculturalism, even if some authors endeavour, helpfully, to specify what is specific to each.

Thus, David Theo Goldberg, in a Reader, considers it is possible to propose a history of multiculturalism in which pluralism would correspond to a stage or a point in the challenging of the hegemonic culture in the United States – white, European, claiming to be universal – and thinks that it refers to the liberation struggles of the 1960s, of which it is 'the ideological and rhetorical fruit', but without bearing the corrosive, challenging element which, in his opinion, is found in contemporary multiculturalism, particularly in its critical dimensions (Goldberg 1994, p. 10). In this approach, for an American, pluralism refers to a very lukewarm approach to cultural diversity, comparable to what the French Republican tradition in its more open and tolerant variants would advocate: we shall return to this point.

In this context, it is easy to understand that the reference to multiculturalism is not really fixed. In fact, it refers to three registers or levels, which should be distinguished analytically, even if, in practice, they are constantly juxtaposed. In this spirit, Christine Inglis, in a text which is

both well documented and clear, observes quite correctly that a discussion of multiculturalism may refer to a 'demographic and descriptive' usage, to an 'ideology and norms' usage and to a 'programme and policy' usage (Inglis 1996; see Cashmore 1996, p. 144).<sup>4</sup> In other words, and to put it in question form: Is multiculturalism an empirically tried and tested reality, which means that cultural differences do exist, in a given society, or within a State? Or, is it not more of a position, or a set of positions in discussions about political and ethical philosophy? And, in the last instance, is it not a principle of political action which materially underpins the institutions, the basic law of a state, and the practice of a number of political tendencies, with the intention of articulating the right of individuals and groups to maintain a specific culture, with the possibility of each individual participating fully in the life of the city, particularly in civic, legal and economic matters? Each of these three perspectives should be referred to a more or less specific approach.

A sociological approach, *stricto sensu*, will primarily be interested in the working of the society in which multiculturalism is found, in the way in which the cultural differences within it are produced, received or reproduced; and in the questions and tensions which this generates. This approach will describe multiculturalism as the problem, rather than the response. Thus, in the opinion of Amy Gutmann, multiculturalism is the issue, the plural reality, which is the starting point for proposing political orientations. It is a 'challenge' and, in her opinion, it is not only societies which are multicultural but, increasingly, their members, or at least some of them: 'Not all people are as multicultural as Rushdie', she explains, 'but most people's identities, not just Western intellectuals and elites, are shaped by more than a single culture. Not only societies, but people, are multicultural' (Gutmann 1993, pp. 171–206).

On the other hand, a political philosophy approach will stress consideration of the advantages and limits or inconveniences of legal or political measures associated with a multiculturalist perspective. It will question in what way it is desirable or undesirable, what it contributes, and what it costs society, in the light of criteria which may be moral or ethical, but also economic. It will make of multiculturalism a possible response, rather than the problem to be resolved.

Finally, an approach in terms of political science will be primarily concerned with analysing the institutional and political forms through which a multiculturalist principle is set up, understanding its emergence and working, or evaluating its effects.

While it is useful to distinguish these three approaches analytically, it is equally useful to articulate them, being careful to conserve their specificity, and then consider how they match. This endeavour should not be confused with the over frequent practice of merging or amalgamating the two registers, thus preventing us from knowing whether the issue at stake is one of the diversified structure and working of society, or a position as

to what would be desirable for society, or, finally, a reference to a specific institution or law. Now when there is a confusion over the species, it is frequently observed that this points to a refusal to consider and discuss, calmly and seriously, the various questions to which the concept of multiculturalism refers and that in the last resort this may even be a way of hurriedly dismissing those whose intention it is to pose them – as Peter Caws points out in the Reader edited by D. T. Goldberg to which we have already referred (Caws 1994, pp. 371–87). I have also discovered this for myself in France, where, in some intellectual circles, a very French way of delaying or preventing the discussion, is to attach the adjective ‘American’ to the word ‘multiculturalism’, thus discrediting the idea, the political trend or the approach by suggesting at the same time that it is based on a concrete experience which has nothing to do with that of social relationships in France (Wieviorka 1997).

## **II. Multiculturalism in practice**

Let us begin, precisely, with the third of the three registers which we have just enumerated, the institutional and political arrangements which explicitly refer to multiculturalism.

### *1. The first experiences: a relatively integrated multiculturalism*

The three countries in which we find the first really concrete examples of multiculturalism are Canada, Australia and Sweden.

In Canada, the starting point was the question of Quebec and its language, French. From 1965, the concept of multiculturalism began to wend its way with the recommendations made in the Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism and the proposal that multiculturalism replace the bicultural policy to take the ethnic diversity of Canadian society into consideration, instead of only referring to the two main groups, the British and the French. Officially adopted in 1971, and incorporated into the Constitution in 1982, in the form of a Charter for Rights and Liberties, multiculturalism from then on was based on extended legislation; a continuation of the initial decision in the spheres of language, culture, education against discrimination; and for equality of opportunity in access to employment or promotion.

It is important not to be naive here. Multiculturalism, as it was invented in Canada at the beginning of the seventies, was not only a response to the difficulties of the cultural or ethnic minorities in the country, and a way of conceiving of Canada as a mosaic and not a melting-pot. It was also, and perhaps even primarily, a way of avoiding or delaying bipolarization in Canada. This was welcomed by the Anglophones, as a pole of identification, as well as by the Francophones in Quebec, by those of the nationalists who saw in it a way of asserting the

democratic character of their nationalism, and their open-mindedness with respect to minority cultures (Taylor 1992; Juteau 1993).

In Australia, the adoption of multiculturalism was less formal. There is no equivalent of the Canadian charter but there is a whole range of official policies and special agencies devoted to the implementation of multiculturalism. In the early 1970s, under a Labour government, multiculturalism was based on a notion of 'social reform' in which programmes were introduced to redress the social and educational disadvantage of immigrants. After the election of a Conservative government in 1975 the meaning changed. Multiculturalism then meant that although there was strong support for immigrants' maintaining their cultural and linguistic traditions, it had always to be understood that the culture of the established society, its political/administrative institutions, would retain its primacy. The overall objective was a socially cohesive multicultural Australian society based on an 'overarching set of values', which would be strengthened by cultural diversity.

By 1989 a change emerged in multicultural policy with the *National Agenda for a Multicultural Society* which included the themes of cultural identities and social justice as well as that of collective economic efficiency. The economic dimension, later referred to as 'productive diversity', was based on the idea of using immigrants' linguistic and cultural capabilities to improve trade and investment linkages with other countries, especially in Asia. This notion of multiculturalism implies, for all the groups and individuals concerned, acceptance of the Constitution and its laws, tolerance and equality as values, representative democracy, freedom of expression and religion, English as the national language, equality of the sexes, and, in the words of Stephen Castles, is to a large extent an expression of 'multicultural citizenship' (Castles 1994, p. 17; see Vasta 1993). In other words, it combines respect for cultural differences, civic equality and consideration for the national economic interest, progress, development and economic cohesion. We should also note here, to avoid any accusation of naiveté, and even if this point may not be fundamental, that this multicultural policy has been important for the image of Australia in its regional strategy *vis-à-vis* the other countries of the Pacific.

In 1996 a Conservative government was elected in Australia which has made considerable cuts in social policies for immigrants. It is currently unclear to what extent the Australian model of multiculturalism will be modified.

Finally, Sweden is a host-country to an immigration which in the first instance was required by and for its growth, with the Finns in particular, then the Yugoslavs, before also becoming a country of political immigration with refugees from Yugoslavia and elsewhere. In that country, the multiculturalism policy adopted in 1975 is based on three basic principles: equality in standard of living for the minority groups in relation

to the rest of the population; liberty of choice between ethnic identity and a specifically Swedish identity; and partnership, the idea here being to ensure that the type of relations in employment means that everyone benefits from working together (Alund and Schierup 1991).

It is worth stressing a characteristic which is shared by all three experiences. In Canada, and perhaps even more so in Sweden and Australia, multiculturalism does not involve a distinct separation between the cultural question and the economic question. Those primarily targeted by this policy are defined in terms of economic participation, and not only in terms of cultural difference. It is for this reason that we can speak here of a *relatively integrated* form of multiculturalism.

Though in a somewhat less significant manner, multiculturalism is none the less explicitly present in other countries at a political level. Thus, in Mexico, the Salinas de Gortari government was instrumental in including in the Constitution the recognition of the Indian peoples and the multicultural nature of the nation. Previously, the 'indigenous integration' of the 1940s had advocated the acculturation and assimilation of the indigenous people; and then, in the 1970s 'indigenous participation' aimed at controlling, rather than recognizing the demands of the indigenous peoples.

Furthermore, multiculturalism may be an institutionalized principle of operating not on a national level, but simply at the local level of a region or town. Thus, in Germany, a country of *ius sanguinis*, where the general cultural policy as a whole is not very open to multiculturalism, in 1989 the local authority in Frankfurt-on-Main set up an Office for Multicultural Affairs which was responsible for ensuring the relations between the local administration and the immigrants. The first person to be appointed to this Office, and remained in it until 1997, was a well-known political figure, Dany Cohn-Bendit.

There are thus various experiences in which multiculturalism is a political principle which materializes in the working of some institutions. Together, these constitute a relatively diverse set of experiences, not all of which originate in the same economic context, some being the outcome of a period of expansion and growth for the country concerned, and others tending to emerge in a period of crisis and recession. The characteristic feature of those which we have outlined above is that the social demands of minority groups are not separated from their cultural demands. Nor are the general economic requirements of the countries concerned divorced from their political, moral and cultural values. This characteristic is the basis of the image of what we refer to as *integrated multiculturalism*.

## 2. *The experience of the United States: disintegrated multiculturalism*

Although the United States is often presented as the country of multiculturalism *par excellence*, we have not yet referred to it in our

examination of instances in which multiculturalism, laid down as a principle, is institutionalized. It must be said that in the US the concrete and practical rooting of multiculturalism does not appear to be part of the institutional measures which are themselves incorporated at the highest level of the political and state system, but instead to permeate social life, originating as demands emanating from the groups and minorities in question. And, above all, multiculturalism there, as an institutionally implemented principle, is basically characterized by its being bisected, so to speak, and implemented by two separate logics, one of which tends to be social and economic, and the other cultural, whereas in the other experiences to which we have referred it seems to be more integrated. To use an image which is somewhat direct, it is *disintegrated*.

The first half of the problem consists of the practice and discussions relating to affirmative action. In the US this practice and these discussions have already acquired considerable historical depth. Affirmative action was the outcome of the civic rights movement in the 1960s, as well as its decline, which ended in revolts in the black ghettos, and in the rising tendency of African-American leaders to demand for their communities genuine control over their own affairs. At the outset, as Pascal Noblet explains clearly, it was a question of 'adjusting the racially oriented means to anti-discriminatory ends' (Noblet 1993, p. 149). The problem therefore is not so much one of cultural recognition, but more one of action against social inequality based on, or reinforced by, racial discrimination.

Affirmative action – which, it should be noted does not exactly imply explicit quotas, especially after the Bakke case, a stimulating analysis of which is to be found in Ronald Dworkin (1985)<sup>5</sup> – was in the first instance conceived of and intended only for black people, but was rapidly extended to women, to Hispanics and to other groups. It is based on a concern for social equality, and not for cultural recognition.

Nathan Glazer considers that 'affirmative action has nothing to do with the recognition of cultures (. . .). It is about jobs and admissions' (Glazer 1997, p. 12). However, in my opinion, affirmative action must be analysed with reference to cultural difference, even if it is not the same thing. Even if the idea of affirmative action moves from the naturalized or the racial, so to speak, to the social, bypassing the cultural, it cannot be divorced from the question of multiculturalism. The fact is that the groups which are supposed to be its beneficiaries, or who demand it, or who are accused of benefiting from it, are defined by a principle which cannot be totally reduced to a state of nature which directly extends into a social state. Because being black, or being a woman is a matter of race or gender, for example, it does not only involve a question of being defined in natural terms. Race and gender are also social constructions, subject to considerable variations from one culture to another, and from one period to another. Moreover, the reproduction and intensification of

social inequalities are conveyed by means of the cultural disqualification of minorities.

The second part of American multiculturalism consists of an issue which is directly and explicitly cultural, namely that of recognition. The latter is the object of discussions, but also of practices, of which the most decisive refer to the working of the educational system, beginning with what happens at university. As far as the teaching of history and literature is concerned, more than in other spheres, we have indeed seen in the United States the setting up of discussions which demand another form of treatment for minorities or for women (whom it would be ridiculous to consider as a minority, even if in many respects the comparison is tempting).

These discussions have sometimes ended in expressions relegating them to the ridiculous, the 'politically correct' deviations which the French love to make fun of. But this is not the main point. The fact is that the demands have emerged, and to some extent have imposed themselves, even if they may conflict with one another, with pleas for the recognition of cultural differences – for example, in school textbooks, in the choice of authors studied in literature, or in the vision of history. Here multiculturalism is closer to a policy of recognition which finds its theoretical unity particularly among those who hold to a so-called 'critical' point of view, and which in fact is the end product of a form of leftism which federates and denounces as being one and the same thing, universalism and the domination exercised by the West, whites, males or the English language.

It is significant that there is no mention of affirmative action in the definition of multiculturalism given in the *Encyclopedia of Social History* (Garland Pub., New York and London, 1994). Multiculturalism is presented as a movement which developed in social science studies and in history. From this point of view, multiculturalism is primarily a radicalization in political thought, operating in particular in the very specific sphere of 'cultural studies' and possibly deviating, as we have seen, into formulations of the 'politically correct'. It is a set of pressures from minority groups who, for example, in the 1980s, requested that their specific viewpoint be taken into consideration in the history and values of the United States. This approach, by doing justice to these special histories or values, would be evidence of respect for them in the educational system and would contribute to minority students' self-esteem and self-confidence.

Thus in the United States there are two different debates: one on affirmative action, and the other on respect for and recognition of, minority or dominated cultures. True, there are similarities between the arguments put forward in these two debates, as we can easily observe on reading, for example, the dossier presented by the journal *Dissent*<sup>6</sup> in an attempt to evaluate the arguments for and against affirmative action.

Moreover, there are forms of communication between these two inventories – one being more social and economic and the other more cultural in nature – for example, those who apply for entry to a university under the policy of affirmative action will subsequently be able to demand that more attention and a fairer view be accorded to the history of their minority, its language and literature. But even if the two logics, cultural and social, which are the foundation of multiculturalism, may thus move closer together in the United States and mutually inform each other, aggregate or inform each other, it is nevertheless the case that they are the outcome of a separate history and that they are expressed by actors who are not necessarily the same.

In other words: in so far as multiculturalism is not expected to distinguish between dealing with social inequalities and lack of respect for and recognition of cultures, the theoretical unity of multiculturalism is not conveyed here by a unity in practice. Consequently, it is possible, here, to speak of *disintegrated multiculturalism*, as against *integrated multiculturalism*, which is more characteristic of the experiences referred to above.

It would be interesting to explore further the socio-historical analysis of the conditions on which the integration of multiculturalism depends. But let us be content with a preliminary conclusion. Multiculturalism – the different variants whose diversity we have only begun to explore – is effectively a response. This response in the case of the Canadian, Swedish and Australian experiences is the object of assessments and evaluations which are public and which reveal that in the main they tend to be, if not positive, at least not negative. More specifically, in the approach of Christine Inglis, the evaluations which are available demonstrate that, while they may not be totally successful in all respects, these programmes are far from being failures. Furthermore, public opinion polls in all three experiences indicate that the general public tends to be in favour, even if the crisis or economic recession would tend to encourage xenophobia, racism, fear or the rejection of the Other rather than open-mindedness towards otherness which the policy of multiculturalism denotes.

Our aim here is to take sides. What is clear, and this is what interests us, is that multiculturalism not only appears as *one* response to certain problems of society, but that this response does not necessarily lead to the worst dramas. It does not prevent democracy from working, and it is not massively rejected by public opinion in the countries that have tried it. Perhaps we shall even be forced to admit, like Nathan Glazer for the United States, that the cause has been heard, and that ‘we are all multiculturalists now’, since ‘we all now accept a greater degree of attention to minorities and women and their role in American history and social studies and literature classes in school’ (Glazer 1997, p. 14). But let us beware of jumping to conclusions. In what way is multiculturalism the right response? And more precisely, what is the question?

### III. The question of difference

The question, in the first approach, is that of cultural difference within democratic societies in so far as there is a demand or expectation, however manifested, for recognition of the latter in the public sphere.

#### 1. *The production of identities*

Since the 1960s, throughout the world, we have witnessed the emergence of demands and assertions of identity, from groups of extremely varied origin, since they can be defined in terms of religion, ethnicity, race, history, national origin, gender, physical disability or serious illness, etc. In some cases, these cultural demands and expectations are directly and closely linked to social inequalities, extreme exploitation in employment, unemployment or the relegation of the actors to an *underclass*, to exclusion and precariousness. In other cases, they are the outcome of a profound desire for historical recognition. They are akin to a demand which bears on the way in which the group in question has been disqualified, stigmatized, or even destroyed or almost destroyed in the past by colonization, slavery, genocide or ethnocide. In all these cases, the demand is less directly socially loaded.

Yet again, difference may constitute a sort of reversal of physical or mental disability, an endeavour by people who are disabled, or who are victims of a serious illness, for recognition in their personal and collective fight against the disability or illness, to be able to participate in the life of the city and, in the last resort, obtain a greater legitimacy for the forms of cultural invention which this type of participation implies – for example, sign language in the case of the deaf and dumb (Wieviorka 1993; 1996). It is essential to distinguish between the four main lines of argument behind cultural difference (cf Kymlicka 1995).

The first is that of groups whose existence pre-dates that of the society in question, which has to some extent attempted to exterminate them – Aborigines in Australia and Indians in America, for example. In these instances, the assertion of an identity frequently combines an acute awareness of the past, and therefore of historical legitimacy, with the awareness of having been the victim of practices which link social inferiorization with ethnic destruction. Although the situation is very different, it does seem to me that slavery is in many respects the origin of attitudes which are close to this first line of argument.

The second is that of the attitude of the host society to the arrival of immigrant populations who bring with them their traditions and culture of origin and who do not necessarily discard them.

A third argument is that of reproduction, which means that groups, whose experience embodies a long-standing culture, endeavour to keep this culture alive, ensuring its vitality, dynamics and perpetuation despite

the disintegration effected by money, the market and, more generally, modern economic life.

A fourth line of argument – that of production – is definitely much more decisive in the constitution of the arguments surrounding cultural difference. One of the characteristics of our societies, contrary to what is generally believed, is that the tendency to cultural fragmentation is much greater than the trend to homogenization, as a result of the impact of the globalization of the economy or of the internationalization of mass culture under American hegemony. In the contemporary world, which some refer to as hyper-modern and others as post-modern, while yet others speak in terms of demodernization, cultural difference is the outcome of permanent invention, in which identities are transformed and recomposed, and in which there is no principle of definitive stability, even if the newest identities are sometimes shaped in very old moulds, as can be seen in the tendencies which reinvent Islam in Western societies.

The first three lines of argument, outlined above, are themselves constantly permeated and informed by the fourth. The whole set of processes, by means of which cultural identities are asserted, must be primarily thought of in terms of change and invention, rather more than in terms of host-society or reproduction.

This remark, which should be developed further, means that we cannot oppose modernity to tradition, as has often been the case in classical sociology and in the evolutionist way of thinking. It excludes the idea that the progress of modernity must be interpreted as a regression of tradition. On the contrary, the rise of differences which often invent the traditions from which they claim descent, is, in the last resort, a way of conveying the very working of modernity. The development of these phenomena is such that it is indicative of the entry into a new age, a sur-modernity so to speak, in which our societies produce increasingly varied forms of traditions and, more generally, of cultural identities, whose stability is not really fixed and which is always liable to decomposition and recomposition.

## *2. Tensions*

The cultural differences which our societies produce – a process we witness more assuredly than our societies acting as a host to, or reproducing, cultural differences – form a heterogeneous collection. It would be artificial to postulate their unity and declare, for example, that they are all part of one and the same struggle. However, they do have numerous points in common, and, in particular, what can be called a principle of bipolarity. They are all liable to demonstrate tension between two main orientations.

On the one hand, each cultural identity is defined by what distinguishes it from other identities, by a boundary which those who wish to protect

their cultural specificity may be tempted to render as watertight as possible. Thereafter, the first possible orientation, within an identity, consists in giving preference to the elements which maintain its integrity, which may lead it to extreme forms of differentialism, to fundamentalism and integrism, as well as to violent forms of behaviour, sectarianism and communitarianism.

On the other hand, individuals who do belong to a particular identity and live in an open and democratic society may wish to rid themselves of the elements denoting their specificity, to participate fully and exclusively in civic life in the economic, political and cultural spheres. Hence a second possible orientation is that of the tendency of actors to rid themselves of their specific identity and to contribute to its disintegration.

In some cases, these two poles delineate a sphere of conflict, tensions and paired oppositions which not only permeate the collectivity in question, but also each of its members, and are resolved by changes in equilibrium, but which are nevertheless equilibriums. In other cases, the disequilibrium is considerable. The tensions reach breaking point and the logic of fragmentation gains the upper hand, with all that this implies – some people assimilating into the society as a whole, others possibly opting for radicalization and living in a closed community. In all cases, as Anne Phillips stresses, cultural groups constitute non-homogeneous entities, and any definition which refers to their specificity is liable to reinforce their exclusion and weaken their capacity for discussion and mobilization (Phillips 1996, pp. 139–52).

Multiculturalism – by which I mean the existence of cultural identities under tension in a democratic society which they may possibly contribute to destructuring – is not so much the problem, as a response to the modern production of identities with a proposal for a political and institutional procedure for dealing with them.

This response has only been possible since the point at which difference ceased to be interpreted as an obstacle or a form of resistance to modernity, or as the remains of traditions which are bound sooner or later to disappear, but as one of its most important aspects, and one that is likely to increase rather than to decline. It is therefore part of the important intellectual scission which saw social and political thought diverging from evolutionist paradigms and ceasing to think of change in terms of a move to *Gesellschaft* from *Gemeinschaft*, or from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity. The groundwork was done in the postwar context of the shock evoked by the discovery of the Nazi endeavour to exterminate the Jews and the Gypsies, and of the awareness – conveyed by the major international organizations from the United Nations down – of the imperative nature of the defence of minority cultures and rights. The path to multiculturalism has thus been facilitated by numerous declarations and texts of an international nature in which this defence is

present, for example in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 22 of which stipulates that

Everyone, as a member of society, . . . is entitled to realization . . . of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

But, in the adoption of policies or of multiculturalist perspectives, the general orientations promoted by the UNO, UNESCO and others have had less impact than the work of the societies in question on themselves, and the changes in their internal realities: the emergence of new demands which, until now, were granted very little political and institutional space; the transformation of political systems, organizations and institutions confronted with these demands; and in their increased capacity to implement social policies or to ensure the working of the Welfare State, etc.

### *3. Individualism and cultural difference*

There is obviously nothing new in stressing the individualism of modern society. This has two aspects: one referring to the individual's desire to participate as fully as possible in modernity, by having access not only to money, and consumption, but also to education and health, and, in the last resort, to work and to employment or political life. The other, which is of greater interest to us here, refers to the subjectivity of individuals; to the fact that they each desire to be constituted as a subject, to construct their own existence, and to define their choices without being subjected to predetermined norms or roles.

Modern subjects, from this point of view, maintain a paradoxical relationship with collective cultural identities. On the one hand, they may wish to be able to participate, and to be identified with a specific collectivity, a memory, a language, a religion, a collective experience and, hence, not to be despised for this identification, or disqualified, and stigmatized by practices which in this case are similar to racism. Self-esteem in this instance is a condition of group esteem and of its recognition. On the other hand, however, subjects are reluctant to be over-dependent and cannot accept being uniquely what the group orders them to be, or the identity assigned to them; they refuse to yield, or even restrict, their personal freedom as the price to be paid for their collective identity. They wish the latter to be the end result of their own choice, and not an obligation prescribed by some form of *ascription*.

In some cases, the individualism of the subject clashes head on with collective identity, or seems to be totally incompatible; this is the case, in particular, when radical forms of Islam deny women the equality ascribed by human rights. But, in other cases, an articulation of the individual subject and collective identity is possible, as, for example, in the case of

the young Muslim woman, interviewed in Turkey by one of my students, who explained to her that she considered it normal to remain a virgin until marriage, and that if her fiancé demanded otherwise, she would refuse to marry him, virginity being her own choice, and respect for this commandment being her own decision.<sup>7</sup>

Whether it be a question of human rights, or individual subjectivity, the theme of cultural difference in democratic societies is permanently confronted with that of individualism, which it can neither dismiss, refuse nor minimize, without opening the way to practices which would mean the end of democracy. Multiculturalism, as a response to the challenges posed by the existence of cultural difference, cannot avoid the theme of the specific subject, which is a source of preoccupation and vexation for collective subjectivities.

#### **IV. Political and ethical philosophy**

Multiculturalism is one response, but not the only one and thereafter constitutes one of the terms in the discussion in which our concepts of social justice, equality of opportunity, equity and democracy are challenged. John Rex, for example, is somewhat critical:

Multiculturalism . . . is a feasible social and political ideal. The real difficulty is that what may gain support under this title will be a fraudulent alternative which dissociates multiculturalism from equality of opportunity . . . the creation of a multicultural society must involve a degree of voluntarism . . . (Rex 1986, pp. 119–35).

##### *1. An arena for discussion*

Four main approaches characterize discussions concerning the space which should be granted to cultural difference in our societies.

The first is that of assimilation. This is essentially based on the idea that the universalism of individual rights is the best response to the possibility of discrimination which is inherent in any classification of people on a cultural basis – usually to some extent naturalized by a reference to race.

From this point of view, the very existence of a public sphere which is neutral and only recognizes individuals is a guarantee of protection, equality and liberty for the individual. In its most radical versions, this orientation has as its agenda the uprooting of individuals from their world of cultural and minority particularisms and is therefore perceived as being, by definition, narrow-minded and, to some extent, closed to the outside world in order to enable their accession to the universal values of the nation and of citizenship. The procedures here may be relatively mild and more in the nature of an encouragement than of an imperative,

but there are instances of ethnocide. In Australia, until the 1950s, Aborigine children were still taken from their families and fostered in homes or institutions, to ensure that they broke with their family and cultural environment, the pretext being to enable the children to accede to modernity.

The second approach is that of tolerance, which allows specificity in the private sphere and even in the public sphere provided that the requests, demands, even the visibility, are not the source of any difficulties. This approach is highly flexible in contrast with the previous approach which may be exceedingly rigid. It is more pragmatic and less ideological, and tends to focus on concrete realities rather than on principles.

A third approach, which corresponds to the definition which we have adopted of the term 'multiculturalism', consists in navigating between two diametrically opposed dangers, that of confining minorities to ghettos and that of their dissolution by assimilation. It implies an endeavour to conciliate the demands of cultural specificity and that of universalism in areas of language, religion and education or access to public services, employment and housing. This could be referred to as the recognition approach, with reference to the ideas of Charles Taylor. It is not a question of tolerating cultural difference, but of ensuring balanced articulation, which is difficult to establish and to maintain, between respect for difference and for universal rights and values. There can be no question of cultural differences in determining the application of *habeas corpus* for example, according to Charles Taylor (1992a), who advocates a policy of recognition in which all cultures should be presumed to be equally valid, but not necessarily so – an assumption which ensures their importance. The search for a 'middle course' is, in fact, a profoundly democratic endeavour, since

[W]hat the presumption requires of us is not peremptory and inauthentic judgments of equal value, but a willingness to be open to comparative cultural study of the kind that must displace our horizons in the resulting fusions (Taylor 1992a, p. 73).

Finally, there is a fourth pole – that of communitarianism – that is to say, the idea that it is possible to ensure the coexistence of communities within the same political space, so long as fairly strict rules (possibly imposed, or managed, by a foreign or distant power) regulate the play of inter-community relations and that of the share and access to power. The political science literature, when it has turned its attention to the various forms of communitarianism, has long since proposed models like that of *consociation*, formulated by David Apter or A. Lijphart, which belong to this type of orientation. We should add that this type of definition of communitarianism, which corresponds fairly closely to the Ottoman model,

and of which the pre-civil war Lebanon was a good illustration (and still is today), is rather different from the 'communitarianism' which we shall discuss later, and which is an extensive school of thought closer to our third approach than to the fourth.

The definition of these four approaches which characterize the arena of discussion on multiculturalism varies from country to country, from one intellectual tradition to another, and from one national political culture to another. But, on the whole, it does seem to be fairly comprehensive, to avoid the pitfalls of ethnocentrism and to be valid, for example, for both the Anglo-Saxon situations and for the French experience.

Thus, for France, it is not difficult to situate an author like Emmanuel Todd as being close to the first approach, Dominique Schnapper as a perfect illustration of the second, and ourselves, as well as several of the CADIS researchers, or Norbert Rouland, as adopting the third approach; none of those who value democracy and the principles of the Republic belong to the fourth approach, with the ethnopsychiatrist, Tobie Nathan being definitely one of those who are closest to it (Schnapper 1991, 1994; Todd 1994; Nathan 1995; Rouland *et al.* 1996; Wieviorka (ed.) 1996). Among the Anglo-Saxon authors, I shall only refer to someone like Joseph Raz who, leaving the communitarian approach on one side (in the sense of our fourth approach) also advances three different approaches, which correspond exactly to those which we have just outlined: 'toleration', policies based solely on the assertion of an individual right (which we refer to as assimilation); and, finally, what he refers to as 'multiculturalism' (Raz 1994, pp. 67–79) as we do, and in terms which are perfectly compatible with those we use.

## *2. The place of the subject in the discussion on difference*

However, even if this representation of the discussion about difference<sup>8</sup> remains relatively superficial, the paradox is that it is in a simpler formulation, organized around the choice between two positions that we can best advance in our thinking. This formulation consists in attempting to consider two diametrically opposed positions, that of the 'liberals' and that of the 'communitarians'. The origin of this opposition, be it new or renewed, is to be found in the discussions in which those who demand more respect for cultural particularisms in public space are opposed to those who see therein a danger and a source of political retreat. Culture, passions and emotions on the one hand, reason on the other, priority of the 'good' over the 'just' for some, of the 'just' over the 'good' for others; consideration for the relations and the historical contexts to which human beings belong when considering social justice and rights for some, appeal to abstract and universal principles for others. A considerable literature exists in which these two approaches are presented as totally incompatible.

However, if we look closer, we realize that in this philosophical discussion, there is at least one point, which is of particular importance in relation to our concerns, on which the best participants from both sides tend to agree, rather than disagree. In their examination of the conditions which are the most propitious to the formation of the individual subject, his/her other development and assertion in our societies where nobody denies the existence of cultural differences, there is at least one similarity in the finality which they recognize. On other points, opposition may be strong but here, the issue at stake is shared, and the question is formulated in the same way.

For the 'communitarians', the answer is that the formation of the individual subject implies, in an intellectual tradition that goes back to Herder and Hegel, that children be able to refer to a culture in which they find the source of dignity and self-esteem. 'Communitarians' therefore advocate that minority cultures be recognized and not despised. The individual will then be enabled to learn about freedom and to constitute himself/herself as a subject. This position is particularly interesting from the multicultural point of view, because it defends specific identities for themselves, as well as in the name of universal values and, more specifically, of the individual subject. Charles Taylor, although it seems to me that he avoids defining himself explicitly as a multiculturalist, is certainly the most important thinker from this point of view, and it is significant that he refers forcefully to Frantz Fanon according to whom the colonized individual, if he is to exist, must purge himself of the depreciating self-images which the colonizers have imposed on him.

On the other hand, the 'liberals' (the term 'libertarians' which is sometimes met in relation to these discussions, refers to a narrow tendency among the 'liberals' which can be described as radical, and which is represented in particular by Robert Nozick) consider that the learning of reason and the constituting of individuals as subjects does not require to be grounded in cultures of an ethnic or racial type, and that the latter may even run the risk, on the contrary, of being a factor of confinement for individuals while at the same time being extremely dangerous for society as a whole. From their point of view, individuals are formed and their preferences established outside of their belonging to society, or previous to it. They are subjects not because they participate in goals shared by a community, but because they can, or will be able to, function freely, as consumers in the market, and as citizens in political life. In this instance, the principles of justice, or, if preferred, the rights, must be fixed independently of any conception of the 'good', without taking into consideration the institutions or communities which mould society in its material form.

What is interesting is that the discussion between 'liberals' and 'communitarians' ends in an impasse, that is to say, in an alternative in which they are totally opposed, with some adopting an abstract form of universalism, and others a position which does not entirely avoid confinement

within a community, whereas they can both agree if it is a question of formulating an issue on the basis of the idea of the subject. The two positions are united in their reference to the subject, but disagree when they become locked into the elementary opposition between universalism and communitarianism.

From then on, there are two ways of bypassing this opposition without at the same time denying it. The first, which is radical, consists in focusing the discussion on the concept of the subject instead of on cultural difference; this path has just been explored by Alain Touraine who explains: 'It is because both the liberal response and the communitarian response are either unacceptable or insufficient that I have introduced the ideas of Subject and social movement here' (Touraine 1997, p. 174). The second consists in attempting to navigate between the two orientations, and in considering that they are theoretically incompatible but that in practice one has to learn to reconcile them, to move from one to the other to enable them to function mutually without the one monopolizing the other, so as to manage in pragmatic fashion, as Amitai Etzioni puts it (classifying himself as a 'communitarian') what is essentially a 'contradiction between society's need for order and the individual's demand for autonomy' (Etzioni 1996, pp. 1–11).

In this second response, one avoids stating over simply whether one is 'communitarian' or 'liberal', in the words of Michael Walzer (Walzer 1994, pp. 185–91), one endeavours instead to be one or the other, depending on what the equilibrium demands. But it is easy to see where this attractive version of pragmatism – which appears in many respects to bring the points of view closer together – leads us (Friedman 1994, pp. 297–339): to a considerable degree of confusion which, as Philippe de Lara notes in the *Dictionnaire de philosophie politique* (1996) in the article on 'Communauté et communautarisme' results in

the discussion taking the form of a maze of questions and arguments in which ontological theses and political positions overlap . . . [and in which the themes] range with no solution of continuity from the philosophy of practical arguments to contemporary problems about the status of "minorities" or the crisis in the Welfare-State, [and] although the position of the protagonists in the discussion as belonging to either the communitarians or the liberals is fairly clear (. . .), there is not a direct opposition, as there was between the Ancients and the Moderns.<sup>9</sup>

On the basis of the discussions between the 'liberals' and the 'communitarians', the philosophical discussion, in its most stimulating aspects, has thus a great deal to gain, from bypassing the rhetorical games into which it is forced in its endeavours to reconcile the irreconcilable, and to adopt the newer categories in which the theme of the subject deserves a

central place. We thus begin to perceive one of the most central issues in the discussions on the place of difference in democracies: the need to introduce a third term, that of the subject, between abstract universalism and differentialism, to bypass the head-on collision between these two viewpoints and articulate them with each other instead of leaving them to confront each other.

### *3. The discussion refused: the French experience*

If the opposition between 'liberals' and 'communitarians' incites us to overcome the contradiction between universalism and communitarianism, another – very French – opposition is primarily a poor polemic conveying in reality a refusal to construct the debate and consider the issue.

Indeed, the French discussion is to a large extent dominated by the advocates of a 'Republicanism' which oscillates between assimilation, the dominant position, and tolerance, which is somewhat less frequent and which criticizes all positions other than their own as extremely communitarian. Those who would be considered 'communitarians' elsewhere, that is to say in favour of recognition and a mild form of multiculturalism are accused of playing the game of the communitarians, either as a result of naïveté or of ignorance. The promotion of a pure, unsullied image of the Republic may in part be explained, as Jean Loup Amselle suggests, by the long history of this country, which is the end product of combinations and confrontations of the Republican principle of assimilation and that of a differentialism confirmed in national historiography, for example, when the history of France is based on the image of a race war between Franks of Germanic origin, the ancestors of the aristocracy, and the Gallo-Roman ancestors of the commoners (Amselle 1996).

It can also and above all be explained by recent social developments, which result in the Republic's being less and less capable of honouring its promises of equality and fraternity. What are these words worth to the millions who have been left behind by social change, to the unemployed, to workers in precarious situations, to the excluded, or again to those who have failed at school? What meaning can they have for the victims of racism which is on the rise? In this context, the discourse of the Republic operates as a myth and as an ideology at one and the same time. It promises to reconcile in an abstract, magical and unreal manner what can no longer be reconciled in reality, developing an artificial image not only of the present but also of the past. It enables those who promote this image to defend interests of which they are not necessarily aware, for example, when it is a question, under the cover of the defence of the Republic and its state schools, of continuing to promote an educational élitism which can only be of benefit to a small section of the population.

'Republicanism' is retrospective, advancing reluctantly, while at the same time paralyzing any consideration of the cultural changes and the

space which they demand. Intellectual paralysis tends to be the order of the day, particularly when the communities referred to by the 'Republicans' are to a large extent figments of the imagination, or dealt with in a totally fallacious manner, whereas those who are the most active pose so few problems to French society that they are only referred to in exceptional instances or as an additional factor.

On the one hand, indeed, Islam is supposed to be the driving force behind communities which are ready to move under cover of Islamism from delinquency and insurrectional violence to the most murderous forms of terrorism, whereas juvenile violence, in the areas of exclusion, is mainly due to young drop-outs who have no specific religious associations, and radical Islamism is only found among a small number of the Muslims in France. On the other hand, the threat of communitarianism is rarely expressed about the Portuguese, or in relation to the populations from South East Asia, who live in a much more communitarian fashion than many other immigrations.

## **V. The limits of multiculturalism**

We now have a clearer view both of the issues involved and the limits of multiculturalism as an answer to the challenges posed by the existence of cultural differences in modern democracies. At first sight, multiculturalism must provide a mode of conciliation of universal principles – rights and reason – and specific values, while avoiding the impasse of abstract universalism, which negates differences, and the deviation of communitarianism – a factor of intercommunity violence and restriction of personal autonomy for those involved. To be operational, it demands democratic arrangements enabling us to evaluate how the differences in question appear in the public sphere, and to discuss them on the basis of real knowledge. These arrangements must enable us to avoid the tyranny of the majority, to recall de Tocqueville's well-known formula, and the tyranny of the minorities, as Philippe Raynaud remarks, in a parody of de Tocqueville.

But is multiculturalism, even in its very mild forms, '*bien tempéré*', to use the words of Alessandro Ferrara (1996), capable of answering all the problems which we have encountered, starting with those which deal with the very nature of the differences to which it is a question of keeping open the possibilities of recognition? A relatively concrete and pragmatic response like that of Ronald Dworkin's in relation to affirmative action may be tempting. On the basis of a distinction between pragmatic questions and questions of principle, he explains that there is no principle which is likely to be opposed to affirmative action and therefore

... the genuinely important issues in the debate about positive discrimination are entirely issues of policy. We must judge various

programs of quota and preference one by one, by weighing practical costs and benefits, not altogether in some scale of principle (Dworkin 1985, p. 5).

But before finally reaching an attitude of this type, it is first appropriate that we examine a number of difficulties which deserve our attention.

### *1. The sphere of application of a multiculturalist policy*

For a multiculturalist policy to be implemented, the cultural particularisms to which it applies must first of all be listed. The American experience of affirmative action is a warning to be taken into consideration here. At the outset, it was intended for a very specific minority group of black people, but, under pressure from the militants, the principle has been extended to many other groups, so much so that it has almost become a general principle, which has definitely contributed to the weakening of its impact. The variety of cultural particularisms is considerable, as we have seen, whether it be a question of religion, ethnic group, nation of origin, gender, etc.

For multiculturalism to be both just and efficient, should we advocate a restricted and relatively homogeneous framework, limited for example to ethnicity alone, or an open framework, accepting the heterogeneity of differences to be dealt with politically, and proposing a fundamental principle for the working of democratic life, and not only a method for dealing with strictly limited problems? In the first instance, multiculturalism is easier to apply, but it runs the risk of excluding some groups who could legitimately demand to benefit from it. In the second instance, it becomes a general rule the application of which may become delicate, or even impossible, and in any event be extremely costly, because the implementation of multiculturalism, over and above its principles, is a set of social policies which call for considerable efforts and close cooperation with people at grassroots level.

Not all cultural particularisms are necessarily amenable to a multiculturalist policy, or wish to be shaped by it. Thus, Joseph Raz notes that it 'is suitable in those societies in which there are several stable cultural communities both wishing and able to perpetuate themselves' (Raz 1994, p. 79).

He adds that these communities must of necessity trust, or be capable of acquiring trust in value pluralism, and, in the last resort, in democracy. All this entails a considerable number of preconditions which, if fulfilled, would almost make the formulation of the problem superfluous or unnecessary. Indeed, multiculturalism seems here to imply for its success a society which is much more peaceful and democratic, despite its differences, than is possible in reality. And now we must listen to the comments of Amy Gutmann, who considers that it implies

... mutual respect for reasonable intellectual, political and cultural differences. Mutual respect requires a widespread willingness and ability to articulate our disagreements, to defend them before people with whom we disagree, to discern the difference between respectable and disrespectful disagreement, and to be open to changing our own minds when faced with well-reasoned criticism. The moral promise of multiculturalism depends on the exercise of these deliberative virtues (Gutmann 1992, p. 24).

This confirms the idea that the preconditions for multiculturalism are such that the problem is almost resolved before having been posed, or that it is based on the Utopia of a society which has already been capable of shaping its project.

Among the conditions referred to by Joseph Raz, we would at once like to retain one which is not always respected. Some communities which fulfil the majority of the criteria he advances may, in fact, be extremely hostile to the very principle of multiculturalism. Thus, in Australia, among the Aborigines and the Torres Strait Islanders there are those who say that they are the only genuine inhabitants of the country, the first and the only legitimate ones, that they have no more connection with the recent influx of immigrants than they have with the British, and that they refuse to be integrated into the same vision of a multicultural society. Or again, one can observe in several European countries that there are temporary immigrations, composed of individuals or groups who have chosen to live only partly in the host country, and are in the habit of returning to their country of origin at regular intervals, or definitively at the end of a period of indeterminate length.

This neo-nomadism, which applies in Europe to numerous Turks, Greeks or ex-Yugoslavs, or to the African workers who practise the 'noria', when it is openly asserted by those who practise it, definitely calls for a policy other than multiculturalism. This is an important issue which has to do with the decline of the very idea of society. Multiculturalism as a policy is usually thought to be within the classical framework for political action, that is, state and nation. But we know that in many countries this framework is weak and that there is not coincidence between the space of cultural differences and the space of the state and the nation. Therefore, correspondence is difficult to establish between political action on the one hand and, on the other, the cultural and social realities that are at stake, and which are infranational or transnational, diasporic.

## *2. Are the preconditions achievable?*

If multiculturalism implies sizeable, stable, viable communities which are already constituted, one might object that this only takes into consideration a small number of the challenges posed by the existence of different

communities in our societies. As we have seen, not all cultural identities are of the type which seek to maintain a distinct identity, and, on examination, those which would appear to be are constantly changing. Cultural particularisms are in the main produced and invented. They are not necessarily fixed, forming a set of norms, rules and behavioural models governing the behaviour of those to whom they apply and corresponding in this case almost to a group essentialism.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, social anthropologists have long since taught us to consider that what they discover in the field, despite appearances, is not necessarily a stabilized culture with considerable historical depth, but the most recent state of a culture.

In open and democratic societies, in which cultural particularisms are by definition in contact with each other, even those which originate in the most long-standing cultures are subject to continual change and thereby to fragmentation and recomposition. Cultural identities, as Fredrik Barth (1995) notes, are in a constant state of flux, which means that any attempt to represent them all in statistical or administrative categories is problematic and even absurd. Thus, in France, we observe that young people of North African immigrant origin were described as '*Beurs*' in the 1980s – an unusual identity, the origin of which is not explained and which is perhaps the reversal in a local slang – '*verlan*', which is itself ever-changing – of the word '*arabe*'. However, there is an increasing tendency to use the adjective '*maghrébin*' for the immigrant populations of North African origin, or the adjective '*asiatique*' for the South East Asian origin immigrants, without realizing that these adjectives in no way correspond to the experience of identity or the definition of their origin by the people to whom they are applied. The paradox is that change, which may involve considerable ruptures, does not necessarily exclude continuity in the last resort, even in the case of identities which are substantially renewed or recomposed: for example, the Islam practised by young people in France is very different from the Islam of their parents, but it is nevertheless Islam.

The first consequence of this type of analysis is that multiculturalism can only apply to some cultural differences, those which are closest to the conditions referred to above, which considerably limits its scope. The second consequence only exacerbates the first. By recognizing identities, a multiculturalist policy is in danger not only of being non-operational, but also of having an effect which undermines its aims. Recognition may result in entrenching elements which, in its absence, would tend to be changed and transformed, thus promoting reproduction rather than production and invention, and to do so to the advantage of only some of those in the group in question.

From this point of view, multiculturalism is likely to build up, or reinforce, the power of traditional figures who have an interest in the political offer which is made to them. It becomes a force for conservatism and clientelism, while the figures in question gradually grow apart from the

population that they are supposed to represent and from its experience. Or another phenomenon occurs, in which the ends and the means are reversed and a group only maintains its identity to benefit from political or economic advantages. Thus, for example, some aspects of affirmative action in the United States have been criticized. It is said that instead of providing the black population, as a whole, with the means of improving its situation, affirmative action has benefited only the few in the middle class, who are thus divorced from the working class and the underclass who, in their own turn, are left with even less, since this policy deprives them of a 'Black Bourgeoisie', as described by Franklin Frazier in the 1950s.

### *3. Cultural difference and social inequalities*

All too often, problems of cultural difference are discussed without consideration being given to the social question. Now recognition, self-esteem and respect are problems which are much less acute for the well-off groups, or even for the socially mixed groups, than for the most deprived groups and those who, moreover, precisely because they are socially deprived, have difficulty in asserting themselves and in constituting themselves culturally. When a minority participates actively in the economic life of the country, its cultural difference is less likely to be rejected and ignored than when it is excluded or marginalized.

This is why the plea for cultural difference, as we sometimes witness it in the middle classes and in élites, possibly extended to the various combinations which this leads to – hybridity, hybridization, interracial mixing of all sorts – may go as far as providing an ideology which thoroughly despises those who are unlucky enough to be able to be 'different' or of mixed race, a new variant of cosmopolitanism which is itself liable to sustain in return the racism and anti-Semitism of the 'red necks' and other 'uglies' (Friedman 1997; and forthcoming). The criticism of anti-racism, as it has been formulated in France in the main, is derived to a large extent from this type of ideological deviation.

If recognition is all the more crucial and problematic for the most deprived groups, this means that a multicultural policy can only have a real impact if, as we saw at the outset of this text in relation to some experiences, it is capable of combining consideration for social and cultural aspects. What could cultural recognition mean for populations who are subject to intense exploitation in employment, or are relegated to poor urban areas and massively excluded from the labour market? If multiculturalism is restricted to a policy of cultural recognition, does it not come after the fight against racial and social discrimination? Is it not irrelevant when it is a question of the poverty of the 'truly disadvantaged', to use William Julius Wilson's expression?

In fact, if multiculturalism is limited to culture alone, there is the

constant danger that it will either appear as a policy in the service of groups which are already well situated socially, or as a policy which is unsuited to the specifically economic and social difficulties of the groups for whom cultural recognition is not necessarily a priority, or in any event, the only priority. This is why, to be in keeping with the questions which it claims to deal with, it must be part of a wider policy, one which is both social and cultural, or itself a combination of social and cultural measures enabling, in the words of Joseph Raz

. . . . to break the link between poverty, under-education and ethnicity. So long as certain ethnic groups are so over-whelmingly over-represented among poor, ill-educated, unskilled; and semiskilled workers, the possibilities of cultivating respect for their cultural identity, even the possibilities of self-respect, are greatly undermined (Raz 1994, p. 78).

Otherwise, it can only appear as a discourse and a practice which at best is fragmented, disjointed and associated with the interests of the dominant groups or the peace of mind of those who confuse respect for cultures and the management of social difficulties – a self-centredness in the service of the Academy or of Finance, to quote the advocates of a ‘critical’ multiculturalism (Chicago Cultural Studies Group 1994, pp. 114–39; Turner 1994, pp. 406–25) – if it does not degenerate into a protest type of radicalism or a hypercritical leftism.

## **Conclusion**

A multiculturalist policy should therefore be a response to a question which has many aspects, since it includes a number of dimensions which cannot in practice be separated. It refers to the need for a democracy to take into consideration cultural differences, some of which originate in stable and recognized groups, but others in much less stable communities which nevertheless demand to be recognized. It demands that recognition be put on the agenda, facilitated or at least debated, with the aim of ensuring its compatibility with universal values, while not being forcibly imposed on groups or individuals for whom it would be inappropriate.

The question is posed in societies where the subject is becoming a central issue and appears as an essential criterion for judgement, with the result that over and above the recognition alone of the groups in question, the legitimacy and relevance of a multicultural policy will be judged on what it contributes from the point of view of the individual subject. It therefore depends on its capacity to enable an increasing number of people to improve their ability to constitute themselves as autonomous subjects, who have learnt to make their own choices, and to communicate

better every day with others. Moreover, the question posed is both social and cultural, and therefore the desired response must combine the fight against exclusion and social inequalities with cultural recognition, while at the same time it can be expected to play a positive role in the economic development of the society in question.

All these conditions form a whole which is an immense challenge for democracy, and it is not certain that what is referred to as 'multiculturalism' is quite up to it. One can, of course reject the poorly informed critiques, those which, for example, reduce affirmative action to quotas, or multiculturalism as a whole to affirmative action, whereas, for example, one evaluation points out that in Australia not a single measure in the programme launched in 1989 in relation to participation for members of minority groups (in policy-making institutions, Justice, the Police, Defence, administrators, the arts, the media, sports . . .) was based on it. 'Affirmative action measures were not proposed as a means of increasing participation', notes Christine Inglis (1996, p. 49).

More seriously, we may wonder how a multicultural approach can be conveyed in concrete terms enabling us to avoid both the pitfalls of abstract universalism, which negates cultural differences, and those of communitarianism towards which there is always the danger that it will deviate. How far and in what way should the mother tongue be taught and the distinctive cultures be promoted for children of immigrant origin, while ensuring at the same time their entry into the language and culture of the host society (Moodley 1991, pp. 315–30)? How far are separate institutions desirable, and what should be the rules for contact with other institutions? Should multiculturalism be institutionalized at the highest level, included in the Constitution, as a fundamental input, conferring on it the nature of a corpus of laws? Or should it be made the subject of policy recommendations which are highly advisable?

But over and above these practical problems, the question remains whether it is appropriate to describe as 'multiculturalist' the policies and orientations which are in the last resort a response to the conditions which we have just outlined. Our conclusion will be very cautious.

In so far as a clearly established policy takes on board some collective identities – those which are the most stable and the most conducive to their members' learning individual autonomy, or accepting to move in this direction, multiculturalism is an appropriate response. It is not acceptable for cultures to be rejected, and ordered to disappear or restrict themselves to the private sphere alone, when they are in no way a challenge to democracy, rights or reason.

On the other hand, given the ceaseless ebbs and flows which play a prominent role in the making and transforming of modern identities, phenomena characterized by mobility and flexibility, multiculturalism, because it is based on a quite different representation of cultural difference, is more of a risk than a satisfactory response. It is preferable here

to invent another vocabulary, or return to the more classical categories, which focus on the subject and democracy. The problem is to promote a policy of the subject (an expression found in Fraisse 1995, pp. 551–64; Touraine 1997), and to operate the democratic mechanisms which are capable of testing, as Taylor says, the assumption that an identity fully deserves to exist, even if it does so in a provisional and ephemeral manner.

In other words, it is a question here of taking into consideration the aspects of culture which are non-essential, inventive, constituting and not constituted, in all these dimensions which result in its emerging in the form of new questions, and not merely as the remains of a past whose authenticity is questionable, as the expression of trends which are appeals to the personal subject and not only assertions of an identity which in some respects is reduced to an essence.

Creating a space for cultural invention, and the weight of subjectivity which goes with it, is not the same as respecting identities which exist and which are endeavouring to maintain their existence, even if the two registers tend constantly to overlap. From this point of view, we can accept the idea of the need to go further than multiculturalism, along the lines suggested by David A. Hollinger (1995), when he refers to a 'postethnic' America, providing that we bear in mind that not all 'postethnic' actors may necessarily be able to choose their identity, and that the latter is sometimes imposed to no purpose by the perception of the Other.<sup>11</sup> The recognition of cultural differences in their permanent renewal and the refusal to fix them, along with the acceptance of responsibility for inequalities and social exclusion, calls for policies promoting exchanges and communication and demands discussions in which the minority and unexpected viewpoints can be heard and calmly analysed, which is part of a democratic approach or culture. The term multiculturalism is too closely associated with the image of the democratic coexistence alone of cultures which are already established to be really appropriate here. It was useful in the formation of decisive discussions; it is now, perhaps, if not exhausted, at least dated.

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**Notes**

1. Nathan Glazer points out that its very first appearance dates back to 1941, in the *New York Herald Tribune Books*, in 'We are all multiculturalists now', Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 8.
2. In Glazer 1997, p. 7, 'We are all multiculturalists now', he indicates other figures: 'The Nexis data base of major newspapers shows no references to multiculturalism as late as 1988, a mere 33 items in 1989 (. . .), 1,200 in 1993 and 1,500 in 1994'.
3. Seyla Benhabib, in the introduction to an important book which she edited, explains: 'The term "multiculturalism" has been used in recent discussions to refer to phenomena ranging from the integration of migrant workers and postcolonials into European nation-states like France and Germany, to the right of the Francophone community in Quebec to assert its cultural, linguistic, and political autonomy, to debates about teaching the "canon" of the Western tradition in philosophy, literature and the arts. Because of its confusing deployment in all these instances, the term has practically lost meaning . . . '.
4. See also Ellis Cashmore, *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations*, 4th edn, Routledge, London, 1996: 'The principal uses of the term multiculturalism have covered a range of meanings which have included multiculturalism as an ideology, a discourse, and as a cluster of policies and practices' p. 144.
5. Ronald Dworkin, *Matter of Principle*, Harvard, 1985. The Bakke case, from the name of a white candidate refused admission to the Davis Medical School as a result of a quota policy, ended with a decision from the United States Supreme Court which amounted to forbidding Universities to use quotas in their selection procedure, but to permit the use of racial criteria. As Dworkin notes (p. 304): ' . . . while proponents were relieved to find that the main goals of affirmative action could still be pursued, through plans more complex and subtle than the plan that Davis used and the Supreme Court rejected'.
6. *Dissent*, (Fall), 1995 includes an important dossier entitled 'Affirmative action under fire', pp. 461–76, which summarizes the arguments which make this theme extremely controversial even for the readers of *Dissent* which is distinctly left-wing.
7. More generally, on this aspect of the relationship of young Muslim women to modern subjectivity, which is only paradoxical in appearance, cf. the work of Nilüfer Göle, and in particular, *Musulmanes et modernes*, Paris: La Découverte, 1993.
8. For another representation of the four main approaches, cf. Gutmann 1993, 'The Challenge . . .', op. cit., which lists cultural relativism, political relativism, all-inclusive universalism and deliberative universalism.
9. *Dictionnaire de philosophie politique*, edited by Philippe Raynaud and Stéphane Rials, Paris, PUF, 1996. Another presentation, which is also excellent, of the discussion between the 'communitarians' and the 'liberals', is to be found by Will Kymlicka in the *Dictionnaire d'éthique et de philosophie morale* edited by Monique Canto Sperber, Paris, PUF, 1996. There are numerous books on the subject.
10. For a criticism of 'group essentialism', cf. in particular Carol Gould, 'Diversity and democracy: representing differences', in Benhabib (ed.), 1996, pp. 171–86.
11. cf. Glazer (1996 OR 1997, p. 160), who points out in relation to Hollinger, that his perspective promotes voluntary assertions of identity and that 'his prescription does not take account of the African American condition, where affiliation is hardly voluntary, where the community of descent defines an inescapable community of fate, where knowledge and moral values are indeed grounded in blood and history . . . '.

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