Inherited Identities and the Concept of Boundary.
Mapping the Multicultural Public Space

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Abstract. Cohabitation of cultures in today's world is no longer just an issue of the domestic politics of multi-ethnic states or an item on the agenda of international relations. Now, when groups of migrants and refugees complicate the landscape of an increasingly unstable and mixed-up world, the problem of cohabitation should be solved urgently. In the multicultural public space of the great western metropolises, the rights and the obligations, the citizenship or the civic virtues of the individuals have a different meaning than they had in the public space of traditional homogeneous societies. The imperative of tolerance in the sense of classical liberalism can no longer regulate the infinite interactions between individuals with different identities, histories and affiliations. Those who meet and live together are not only free agents, defined by the ability to deliberately choose and build their common destiny, but also bearers of inherited collective identities that demand public expression. Ignoring the cultural differences or "exiling" them in the private sphere, as deontological liberalism proposes, would impede the exercise of a fundamental right, the freedom of expression. The meeting of cultures and the realization of a *modus vivendi* depends on the reactivation of a perennial function of the public space, that of making distinct, visible what otherwise would have been consumed in the shade and anonymity of the private, domestic life. This study intends to demonstrate how the coexistence of the inherited collective identities also depends on the recognition of the notion of *boundary* associated with the cultural identity, given that the ethnic cultures manifest in the new public space at least a symbolic territoriality. For the distinctive identity of the ethnic communities is built on the recognition of *the Other*, therefore of a certain demarcation, not only on the fidelity to the inherited values and traditions.

Key words: cultural identity, politics of recognition, symbolic boundary, multicultural citizenship, cultural rights.

The coexistence of cultures in today's society is no longer realized in the traditional frameworks of stable social arrangements and political relations. The unprecedented dynamics of individuals and groups, the labour migration and intensive tourism, the improvement of communication and transport technologies have created situations of multicultural cohabitation, especially in the large and crowded cities. Individuals, belonging to different races, ethnicities, religions try to adapt to these new configurations. The open society, when we are referring to identities, is an inclusive society, with porous boundaries, which makes possible the acculturation, the mixture of races, cultures and traditions. At the same time, there is a resistance of the old community relations, of the inherited identities and a competition between them for the assimilation of the public culture and for the instrumentalization of the public space. The clash of civilizations, as predicted by Huntington (1996), has turned out to be a surprisingly prescient description of many of the social problems that I will treat here: tensions between the culture of the majority population of a state and its historical minorities or recent immigrants; the constant struggle for recognition of the distinctive identity of these minorities; the cultural rights of these groups in the public space."

All these issues raise difficulties in the field of normativity: what could be the principles, norms and rules to be followed by public policies for social inclusion or strategies for multicultural coexistence? The neutrality proposed by deontological liberalism proves insufficient. That is because, together with rational individuals, guided by the imperative of maximizing their own benefits, in the public space of democratic and pluralistic societies appear diverse cultures, traditions, confessions, that is to say, the inherited identities as political actors.

The mere toleration of these groups is no longer sufficient, and can be criticized as arrogant ethnocentrism. Ignoring them for the benefit of an abstract citizenship and sending them along with the inherited cultural ties in the private sphere couldn't be accepted, given the nature of these identities, their cardinal importance for the dignity and integrity of human persons.

That's why they demand public expression, first of all as recognition of their distinctive identity, of their face circumscribed by a symbolic *boundary*, marking the area of contact with other groups, and then as recognition of certain collective rights that allow them a progressive cultural self-determination. Since all of these claims can be politically manipulated, they are a potential threat against the rule of law, the current legal order and the individual rights and freedoms.

I. CULTURAL DIVERSITY AS A FACT AND VALUE

Late modernity offers us the social landscape of an unprecedented cultural diversity. The phenomenon of migration has determined people representing ethnic communities to leave their original place of formation and come into contact with customs and traditions of completely unknown societies until then. The social spaces where the meeting of cultures takes place have no longer the profile of the anthropological places of cultural formation. They don't depend so much on the geographical and natural environment of the location and can no longer count on a territorial delimitation. Multicultural social spaces, operating on the principle of integration, are dynamic, interactive communities, capable of indefinite expansion. They no longer know stable vicinities, the emplacement into an ethno-cultural context with foreseeable evolution that confirms their distinct cultural identity, but they tend to incorporate these vicinities.

As an expression of globalization, the city transforms the way we perceive the environments. As an intersection of the flow of people and things, the western metropolis replaces many of the familiar places, to which we had in the past different expectations and different experiences, with *non-places* (Augé 1995, 78). This also means a certain porosity of the borders, a basic political culture built on the principles of integration and inclusion, the configuration of new, short-term, flexible and unstable neighbourhoods, due to the contact of the new groups and communities. The great metropolises create the unprecedented possibility that the ethno-cultural groups of remote homelands become neighbours and have to learn to live together.

If the villages and the ethnographic regions could provide a certain security and cultural homogeneity to the traditional communities, by a rigorous delimitation of the foreign, allogeneic elements, by solidarity and the interweaving of the relations of kinship and neighbourhood, the city is welcoming with strangers, celebrating dynamism, interaction and diversity. The communities of traditional villages, obeying to traditions, customs and ancient rhythms of life, were those *Gemeinschaften* in which cultural identity and homogeneity were based on relationships of solidarity and mutual personal knowledge of their members (Tönnies 1963). The social space of the urban areas establishes a new horizon of normativity, which is no longer legitimized by local traditions and identities and offers particular cultures the possibility of meeting and a suitable framework for their coexistence.

> At the core of interculturalism as a daily political practice are two rights: the right to difference and the right to the city. The right to difference means recognizing the legitimacy and specific needs of minority or subaltern cultures. The right to the city is the right to presence, to occupy public space, and to participate as an equal in public affairs. (Sandercock 2009, 219-20)

Belonging to a multicultural society implies, however, a commitment of all members, beyond their inherited identities, to the political community and to the principles of justice that make possible the non-conflictual coexistence of different ethnic groups. According to Bhikhu Parekh, at least three major forms of cultural diversity can be distinguished in modern societies (2000, 3). The first, in which the members of the society share the attachment to the system of values and beliefs of the common, official culture, implicitly to the principles of justice and public reason that support them, but they carve out within this culture their own, unconventional beliefs and practices which determine them to discover their affinities, common interests and to associate in groups. Gays, lesbians or some professional categories, for example, do not represent an alternative culture, but seek to diversify the existing one. Parekh calls it *the subcultural diversity.*

A second form of cultural diversity is represented by the members who adopt a critical attitude towards some of the fundamental principles and values of the society with the intention to rebuild it, to improve it. This is what feminists do when they attack patriarchal tendencies, religious groups when they protest against secular tendencies, or environmentalists who disapprove the anthropocentrism and technocracy of certain practices and institutions. This is called *perspectival diversity.*

But cultural diversity *stricto sensu* applies only to ethnocultural communities, historical minorities of the national states or groups of migrants, who continue to live according to inherited value systems and traditions, or to religious communities that profess coherent, self-founded lifestyles by virtue of a comprehensive vision on life. Parekh calls it *communal diversity* (2000, 4). The differences between individuals, those based on the uniqueness of each destiny, of each personal history, do not represent authentic anthropological diversity, because they don't establish yet a symbolic demarcation between *us* and *them*, or the sense of belonging offered by ethno-cultural membership.

Multiculturalism is not about difference and identity *per se* but about those that are embedded in and sustained by culture; that is a body of beliefs and practices in terms of which a group of people understand themselves and the world and organize their individual and collective lives. Unlike differences that spring from individual choices, culturally derived differences carry a measure of authority and are patterned and structured by virtue of being embedded in a shared and historically inherited system of meaning and significance. (Parekh 2000, 2-3)

Individual identity is also the result of personal choices or of the way in which each reacts to the social context and inherited identities, the way in which they recognize and interpret them. But individual identities, the result of the intersection of countless belongings and choices, don't inherit, are not transmitted and don't create group solidarity.

Cultural diversity is an undeniable fact. This is a common-sense empirical finding, starting from which we can situate ourselves later, affirmatively or disapprovingly. In a study prepared at the request of UNESCO, Claude Lévi-Strauss compares cultural diversity with natural diversity: it is good to protect cultures and their specificities, even if the pressure of globalization pushes things towards uniformity, as it is good to maintain diversity of natural species and ecosystems. The preservation of cultural diversity is good, so it could be a norm, a regulative principle for national policies and for international politics. (Lévi-Strauss 1987, 12-7)

II. INHERITED IDENTITIES AND THE CONCEPT OF BOUNDARY

According to Giddens, „modernity is inherently globalizing" (1990, 63). The seemingly irreversible process of globalization produces remarkable effects in the morphodynamics of traditional communities and on the anthropological sites that once housed them. Exposed to the incontinent flow of people and goods, to significant demographic movements, the places of birth and flowering of traditional cultures open their borders, becoming more permissive and more dynamic, receptive to change. The immemorial village is transformed from an enclosure, which used to house the peasant community and to preserve its way of life transmitted from generation to generation along with the cultural heritage, into a crossroads, becoming in many respects just a place of passage. At the same time, extensive tourism transforms picturesque places into holiday destinations, natural wonders and local cultural products into consumer goods.

Modernity supposes the loss of a type of face-to-face interaction characteristic for pre-modern societies, for the purely local existence of man. "Globalisation can thus be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa."(Giddens 1990, 64) From day to day, cultural identity, which is an intrinsic value, is interpreted as an instrumental or exchange value (a transactional one). The symbolic goods that form the hoard of a particular spiritual culture has been transformed by modern social reality into a banal spectacle, either through excessive musealization or by marketing. The feeling of familiarity that humans nourish for the local context of

their daily existence is accompanied by the increasing awareness of the integration of the cultural place in global socio-economic and institutional processes. The corner store where we do our everyday shopping is also one belonging to the chain of stores spread all over the world, with the same specificity and even a similar design. But this is just an example of globalization of capital. People continue to live concretely in real localities, but which are affected, disturbed, and/or modified. The cultural places, the landscapes, the familiar and comfortable cultural environments, favourable to life, are imperceptibly affected by influences, events and distant social processes.

Globalization doesn't destroy localities, it just transforms the way we experience them. Due to the internet and television, we feel this not only in the public space, but also in the private life. Events from the farthest corners of the world become at least as important as those that happen in our neighbourhood, they affect our lives and make us supportive of people and of their problems everywhere. Through these processes of universal connectedness, the experience mediated by communication overlaps the immediate experience. The local universe of small communities acquires transparency, a certain availability to resonate with informational flows and with representations from distant areas. Due to international relations, the capitalist economic system and the internet, localities are exposed to a phenomenon of cultural synchronization.

This reinterpretation of local cultural experience under the pressure of globalization processes was inspired by Arjun Appadurai who conceived the term *ethnoscape* (1990). It's a term whose ambiguity properly translates the situation in societies of late modernity, whose public space is disputed by contradictory, normative exigencies. The claim to the right of sovereign nation in the inhabited territory, made by ethnic majorities in national states, the claims to recognition of a relative cultural, even political and territorial autonomy and self-determination coming from historical minorities, the identity claims of ethnic groups, migrants' communities from the diaspora oppose the norms of democratic, national, regional citizenship (the European, for instance) or the cosmopolitan ones formulated in the name of respect for universal human rights. To nations and historical minorities, the ties with the inhabited territory are essential for the awareness of their own identity. It is the first meaning of the term *ethnoscape*:

> The attachment to specific places and the drawing of spatial boundaries to designate "home" from "outside" are, nevertheless, processes that have become characteristic of ethnicity, and more particularly nationhood. In the form of "territorialization of memories", they have proved crucial to the creation of *ethnoscapes* and the emergence of nations. One can see this particularly in the processes by which the memories and history of a community are linked to specific places, namely, the "naturalization of community" and the "historicization of nature". (Smith 2008, 35)

At the same time, the term designates the social landscape produced by human groups in motion in the conditions of today's economic migration or tourism and points rather to the emancipation, detachment from the limiting constraints of a territory and of an ethno-cultural specificity: "*ethnoscapes* produced by flows of people: tourists,

immigrants, refugees, exiles and guest workers." (Appadurai 1990, 296) In the term *ethnoscape,* Appadurai refers to the growing movement of peoples into one another due to immigration which changes the global dynamics. In *technoscape*, Appadurai addresses the growing spread of technology. *Mediascapes* are narrative or visual representations of parts of reality which shape the perception of the other, fantasies, ambitions etc. *Ideoscape* relates to the ideological dimension of states and other environments.

Social identity involves a constitutive ambiguity, whether it's a constructed or a chosen identity, or it's an inherited one. It can be thought both in terms of similarity and of difference. Anthropology as a research of other cultures can be considered as the study of diversity *par excellence*. Anthropologically, the concept of *ethnicity* can be characterized as a boundary-concept, first of all when it raises the question of how members of a cultural community perceive themselves. For social identity depends on its awareness and how it is perceived and imagined. The ambivalent character of social identity is associated in the minds of members of the ethnic groups with the dichotomies *us/them, inside/outside*. Thus, individuals depend on how they determine symbolically the aporia of social identity at the level of collective representations. The boundaries of the ethnic group are the symbolic limits imagined by its members, which they attribute to the group they belong to. It remains to be seen whether these are imagined in relation to the content (the ethnic determinations) of the group or to other groups.

Ethnicity can be regarded as a fundamental fact, as an extension of kinship, as an expression of common interests or as an imaginary/symbolic construction resulting from the interaction with other groups. Sometimes the term doesn't describe the ethnic belonging, but the feelings associated with it, those of loyalty to the group. According to the interactionist interpretation, the ethnic identity is constructed starting from the difference that the members of one group find when they meet the members of another group. The attraction and solidarity between those who feel they belong to the same group is indissociable from the rejection of those who are perceived as different, as not belonging to the group, as *strangers*. An isolated group could not acquire the consciousness of its own identity and could not provide its members with the sense of belonging. The interactionist interpretation of ethnicity puts on the second plane the possession of certain cultural features by the members of the community or the evocation of a common past. The invocation of a boundary (Barth 1969) is related to the idea that ethnicity is only contrastive. Also in this perspective ethnicity is nothing but politicized cultural identity.

The social space of the multicultural community creates the possibility of meeting for ethnic groups, for different traditions and inherited identities. All these social structures express a certain distinctive identity. Unlike consensual associations, interest groups, clubs or parties, which express first of all a conjunctural convergence of options and interests, cultural communities or religious traditions, have greater persistence and a certain resistance to influences and interferences. Within the paradigm of interactionist interpretation, one could say that fidelity to formative cultural values and principles, in the case of inherited identities, is counterbalanced by a reaction of resistance to the influences

that ethno-cultural or religious groups feel in the area of contact with other groups and traditions. The boundary is not only the area of transit and exchange of cultural values and forms, the area of borrowings, contamination and creative mixtures, it is also the area where each of the cultural fronts resists the other, striving to remain identical to itself.

Frederick Barth's contribution to research on ethnicity, by contrast, stands the interactionist thesis on its head. He considers that the identity of a group is not given by some inherent features of the group, but is generated by its very *boundary* (Barth 1969). The contact enables the exchange of people, cultural elements, social practices and values through the acculturation process; that's why it is surprising that the contact area contributes to the preservation of the ethnic groups, by maintaining the boundary and thus *the delimitation*. The boundary is not only the area of symbolic interaction and social exchange with the otherness, but also the area where the identity is symbolically constructed, as reflected by the finding of alterity, of difference. The contact between heterogeneous elements allows for the construction of a group identity through the observed differences – the *ipse identity* (Ricœur 1993). However, the content of the internal features - values and practices – shouldn't be underestimated, as they are invoked to proclaim the difference from the group with which the community comes into contact. Therefore, it is possible to postulate an interdependence between the inherited character of the cultural identity and the limit it presupposes. In the multicultural public space, ethnic or religious memberships will emerge as distinct identities, more persistent than the chosen or arbitrary constructed identities and will not melt into the social anonymity of the political culture that ensures the normative framework of their coexistence and recognition. The distinctive identity of ethnic or religious communities, founded on the assertion of a cultural heritage, is intimately related with a limit and a certain symbolic territoriality in order to be recognized in the public space.

Just like anthropological "places" (i.e. cultural identities), traditions represent a preservation of the structure in motion (transformation and conservation as well). Group cohesion, homogeneity, go hand in hand with the assertion of the border; the more defined the border (demarcation of alterity), the more homogeneous (culturally speaking) the group. People tend to behave according to the representations they have of each other. In fact, the social imaginary contains the totality of conceptions of the group: the way group members perceive themselves within the group, the way they perceive the group in relation to the world, the way the group is perceived by others. The intra-community space of an ethnic group is a space of reciprocity which the awareness of belonging and thus solidarity derive from. It is true, no culture is homogeneous, but what is unique about it *makes us represent it* as homogeneous. However, imagination acts essentialistically when articulating collective representations. Group solidarity is first and foremost an effect of imaginative processes which isolate certain representative cultural elements and attribute them to the entire community, ignoring internal bio-anthropological differences: it is those elements which emerged from interaction with other groups, communities.

Therefore, cohabitation is possible when not only the difference of interacting groups is mutually recognized, but also their homogeneity.

We might consider that the imaginative process which determines collective representations as an identity through difference, starts from the symbolically postulated boundary. However, such a collective representation also requires the invocation of a content, of an *inside* that ensures the intra-communitary cohesion. Although Barth emphasizes the boundaries, the areas of contact with *the Other*, as a decisive factor in defining the identity of a group, he remains wedded to an essentialist and static vision of the ethno-cultural identity. Instead, Richard Jenkins argues that communities are more than observable social facts, which in a functionalist interpretation should be treated as things, that is, as passive, relatively persistent, observable entities. Rather, communities should be seen as relationships and as processes, as permanent redefinition of borders and contents. Due to social interaction, the boundaries of the groups are flexible, they constantly reproduce and reconfigure. Further, it should be noted that there is a risk to interpreting cultural identity in the Jenkins manner: to consider the interactions within the group as significant as those between groups. Ethnic collectivities are symbolic systems that emerge in social interaction, are generated through shared knowledge, common behaviour and established and acknowledged ways of doing things. And through the way their members perceive themselves symbolically *inside* in order to dissociate from *outsiders*, who don't belong to the community, or culture (Jenkins 1997, 19).

The great metropolises offer the disconcerting spectacle of the de-regulated contact of individuals and groups of different belonging, they represent the exemplary expression of an interconnected world that brings the difference in proximity. Paradoxically, the individual is the bearer of the identity of the community from which it comes. Individual identities are, however, the intersection of certain collective identities. Human individuals are trapped in kin relations, are fathers, spouses, belong to professional communities, are loyal to communities of origin, belong to churches, parties, etc. The individual identity is part in the fabric of all these collective identities. That's why individuals are unique. But, paradoxically, it is precisely because they are unique, that they are similar, that they are so many instances of uniqueness. The differences between them become visible only when they invoke their belonging to the different collective identities, that is, they are different precisely under the collective aspects, which concern the belonging, of their identity. Nevertheless, certain memberships depend on initial choices, are reducible to options, preferences, interests and have an instrumental significance. This is the case of the interest groups that break down as soon as the objective that held their members together has been reached.

> Communal diversity is quite different. It springs from and is sustained by a plurality of long-established communities, each with its own long history and way of life which it wishes to preserve and transmit. The diversity involved here is robust and tenacious, has well-organized social bearers, and is both easier and more difficult to accommodate depending on its depth and demands. (Parekh 2000, 4)

The inherited collective identities, as in the case of belonging to an ethnic community of origin or to a religious tradition, have a greater persistence and a greater cohesion, because they are based on non-instrumental values and meanings. These meanings are a social regulator that expresses itself in terms of resistance to influences and which becomes operative only through the social imaginary and collective representations. In the act of identification, whether it is about groups or individuals, it doesn't matter how we perceive ourselves, but how others perceive us or how we would like to be perceived by them. In all these hypostases of perception, projection or self-awareness, the imaginary is actively involved. The social imaginary is an efficient operator which shapes normativity, defines preference, option, adhesion to certain regulations or to certain framework and language of negotiation of identity relations in societies within national or multi-ethnic states. The social imaginary is active, creative and supports social reality. It has a regulative function (in the Kantian sense) and hence a constitutive function (it establishes social reality) which makes certain norms, regulations necessary by requiring them as social life needs and then imposing, supporting, legitimising them.

In the real world, there are no homogeneous ethnic communities, as there are no consistent traditions, without heresies or apostasy. But the imaginary is the active social element that corrects reality at the level of collective perceptions or projections, a regulatory landmark that shapes norms and behaviour. It is the one who projects homogeneity where there is but heterogeneity, organic solidarity where people have only interested cooperation. Even if in reality, the nation, as interpreted by Ernest Renan (1982) in the 19th century, is a voluntary association reconfirmed by a tacitly assumed daily plebiscite, it appears as a coherent community at the level of collective representations. On the model of ethnicity construction, it can be assumed that the national identity was in the same way projected, as a community that, although diverse and numerous, appears supportive, coherent, homogeneous. The nation is an imagined community (Anderson 1991), in the sense that the social imaginary is the one that creates and maintains the impression of strong, quasi-personal connection between its current members and between the succeeding generations; that's why it establishes norms and values, determines behaviours, creates social reality and history.

III. NORMS OF COHABITATION IN THE MULTICULTURAL PUBLIC SPACE

Based on these considerations, we can conclude a close connection between the social imaginary and the emergence of norms and rules. They must regulate not only the relationships between individuals, but also between groups. Therefore, collective identities can be considered as moral agents that can reconfigure the arena of normative landmarks in the social space.

Multiculturalism is not an *ex nihilo* creation of the postmodern world, but it appears even in pre-modern societies. In the era of Ottoman Empire's expansion, there was the so-called *millet* system, in which the religious communities had the right to self-govern

each according to their own jurisdiction. This means that religious pluralism can work in non-democratic societies as well. However, in pre-modern societies, ethnic or religious minorities had a subordinate status. They governed themselves in internal matters, meant to preserve their cultural identity, but not in relations with the imperial authority. They had, so to speak, cultural rights, but not political rights. For example, in the Ottoman Empire, only Muslims had full citizenship. In modern societies, ethnic and religious communities claim equal political rights.

Ethnic multiculturalism appears in countries that are faced with the following issue: a *de facto* diversity of ethnic groups and only one (public) national culture in which all citizens, members of these groups, have to assimilate each other. The "American Creed", meaning one public culture only, that was passed on by the founding fathers of America, led to a counter-reaction of the migrants' groups or of the Black population, who did not find themselves in this national culture: thus, multiculturalism made its mark in America (Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, natives, i.e. indigenous groups). Canada and Australia were faced with the same situation. Therefore, multiculturalism emerges as a (plausible) answer to multicultural cohabitation situations in multi-ethnic states, being the normative answer to this state of fact, which can be expressed in the form of public discourse, of official policies or of explicitly formulated law.

In the multicultural public space, the issues of cohabitation get complicated. Multiple, unpredictable interactions, mixtures, miscegenation and naturalizations are counterbalanced by an equally natural tendency to preserve the identities of origin. Resistance to the alienating effects of the mixture of races, cultures and traditions (*melting pot*) is sometimes expressed by segregation or ghettoization. Communities (the frequently underprivileged ones) group in neighbourhoods based on religion, origin, traditions, norms, values. In order to preserve the inherited collective identity, they look for ethnic homogeneity, which makes the mixture difficult or even impossible. Such isolated communities ensure a certain solidarity and security of their members. Other times, ghettoization is the effect of state policy, being imposed, as in the case of the apartheid which the black population of South Africa was subjected to.

But how to maintain the egalitarian ethos of the modern world, when at stake are no longer individuals, but cultural groups, who demand public recognition, equal respect, and the right to self-determination and self-government in internal affairs? The recognition of cultural rights for ethnic groups of migrants or for historical minorities entails an inequality against the majority population of a national state or the dominant community. Why should one be afraid that people are concerned about asserting their collective identity and why is this fear so persistent? Because any identification means delimitation, distinction, separation and can be the source of hierarchy, injustice and inequity, even in the form of positive discrimination. Also, because inherited collective identities have a greater capacity for survival and can undermine the chosen or constructed ones. For modern societies, whose institutions reflect the egalitarian ethos, any normative model (legal or moral)

will rely on the distinction between public and private and on an individualistic social anthropology.

At the same time, the claim of the members of the cultural communities to receive the public recognition of their distinct collective identity is legitimate. Starting from the example of ancient Greek cities, Hannah Arendt acknowledged the importance of public space as a favourite *locus* of visibility and affirmation of each unmistakable individual face:

> For though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it, and the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects. Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. (Arendt 1998, 57)

In the multicultural public space, the situation is much more complicated than in the homogeneous public space of the ancient polis. The normative requirements of the recognition politics contradict the individual natural rights, especially when for their realization they invoke the so-called cultural rights. For the supporters of methodological individualism, any society is regarded as a consensual association. Ethno-cultural groups are no exception either. Society is a sum of individuals; only individuals have full ontological reality. Consequently, they are the source of any normative theory. So, cultural rights as collective rights cannot be recognized. John Rawls's theory of justice is a normative theory that, like any contractualist theory, strives to legitimize that political order that protects individual rights. Rawls proposes a thought experiment according to which the constitutive principles of a just society are freely chosen by human individuals as rational agents behind the veil of ignorance, that is, when the benefits and social position arising from social competition after the entry of people into society remain unknown. The two principles are:

> First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others. Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all. (Rawls 1971, 60)

The individuals' belonging to ethnic groups cannot be invoked alongside the principles of justice (as stipulated by deontological liberalism) for the regulation of public space. It is that society which derives its rules, procedures and institutions from certain principles not resulting from a particular view of the world or good that will be just (and equitable). That is why they are sent to the private sphere of individual existence or of elective affinities and tastes that the civil society members share. Cultural identity shares, according to Rawls' deontological liberalism, the same fate as the substantive values, beliefs, views of the world and of the good. What Rawls means is that ethno-cultural membership (just like values, moral beliefs, ideals) should not influence the choice of the principles of justice, of the rational, deontological way in which cohabitation must be regulated.

Human individuals as rational agents are conceived not only as selfish, mercantile beings capable of making, based on a deductive calculation, voluntary, consensual

decisions regarding the best form of social beneficial cooperation. They are also conceived as beings that are defined mainly by the ability to choose and not by what they choose or by the context of choice.

Procedural liberalism assumes, *a priori*, that moral doctrines, worldviews are necessarily particular, that they cannot be the subject of a disinterested and objective rational consensus. Values, beliefs, convictions, which can be freely professed in the private sphere and can be publicly expressed as long as they do not prejudice the existence of the other members of society, have the same fate. But instrumental reasoning subordinates the values of interests, deconstructs traditions, loyalties, affiliations, the entire identitary ethos. Sandel criticizes the simplifying anthropological model of deontological liberalism in which man as a rational agent is defined only by his ability to choose:

> The priority of the self over its ends means that I am not merely the passive receptacle of the accumulated aims, attributes and purposes thrown up by experience, not simply a product of the vagaries of circumstance, but always, irreducibly, an active, willing agent, distinguishable from my surroundings, and capable of choice. (Sandel 1982, 19)

The ultimate consequence of this vision is the reduction of all identities and affiliations to the choices made by the individual. Therefore, traditions and affiliations can no longer have a constitutive role in shaping the human individual, but are mere contingent determinations, which can be changed by free decision.

The political reality of coexistence of cultural groups in today's world requires the rethinking of political theory. The pluralism of values and life forms has made it clear that looking for a consensus is impossible not only with regard to values, but even to principles. That is why even Rawls finds himself compelled to reformulate the initial version of his liberal theory so as to acknowledge the right to existence of various ways and styles of life, hence of traditions and cultures with their specific features. The compromise solution is to abandon the ideal of a universal, rationally abstract consensus and accept some forms of *overlapping consensus* (Rawls 1993, 141-2). Such an overlapping consensus becomes required when cultures and lifestyles, grounded on radically different/incompatible experiences, fundamental values, world views and conceptions, come to coexist.

In that event, multicultural public space should not rely on the ideal of *consensus*, but on the pragmatic exigency of *coexistence*, negotiated by taking into account the cardinal values which guide specific lifestyles and behaviour elements which best express ethnic groups. The rules of cohabitation should be adapted to the context and should involve mutual recognition, the importance of cultural difference in addition to equality of rights. The principles of cohabitation and cooperation should express a *modus vivendi* and not abstract principles (Gray 2000, 105-140). The rules of cohabitation should be adopted in the presence of values and not disregarding them, behind a symbolic veil of ignorance. This entails a rethinking of the relationship between public space and private sphere.

Regarding the relations between fundamentally incommensurable cultures, one cannot speak of a consensual agreement on the model of the social contract. There is a

temptation to solve the problem of coexistence of ethnic groups by invoking a surrogate identity, a constructed one – *citizenship* – instead of inherited cultural identities.

Cultural affiliations are not necessarily an obstacle to citizenship. *Multicultural citizenship* does not abandon the doctrinal foundation of human rights, but, at the same time, is a much more nuanced institution because it takes into account the ethno-cultural differences among individuals; it supports a unitary politico-administrative, though not uniform, identity; it is a form of differentiated citizenship which is sensitive to values and the collective identities of affiliation of individuals (Kymlicka, 1995).

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