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Multiculturalism(s)?
A critical appraisal

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Various normative stances or responses in respect of multiculturalism are distinguished and briefly evaluated. The article focuses on what can be called "mosaic multiculturalism" — a multicultural condition (and concomitant responses) in which communities and individuals strive to protect (aspects of) their value systems from contamination or erosion by others and demand public recognition of them. The article examines the justifiability of such a "politics of recognition". It tries to show that the ultimate ground of "mosaic multiculturalism" is an aporia, which allows for ongoing intercultural critique, and provides a basis for intercultural tolerance.

Multikulturalisme(s)? 'n Kritiese beoordeling

Verskeie normatiewe beskouinge van of reaksies op multikulturalisme word in hierdie artikel onderskei en kortliks beoordeel. Die fokus val op wat "mosaïek-multikulturalisme" genoem word — 'n multikulturele toestand (en die reaksies daarop) waarby gemeenskappe en indiwidue poog om (aspekte van) hulle waardesisteme te beskerm teen beïnvloeding of ondermyning deur ander waardesisteme en aandring op publieke erkenning van hul eie. Die regverdigbaarheid van so 'n "politiek van erkenning" word ondersoek. Die gevolgtrekking is dat "mosaïek-multikulturalisme" uiteindelik berus op 'n aporie, wat voortgaande interkulturele kritiek moontlik maak en tegelykertyd die grondslag lê vir interkulturele verdraagsaamheid.

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The crucial commonality of the
human race is particularism.
Michael Walzer (1993: 19)

A principal characteristic of almost all present-day societies and of the world as a "global village" is the daily co-existence, interaction and communication of people of various creeds and cultures. Today, ordinary people's encounter with difference, ie with cultural and/or religious value systems, beliefs and practices different from their own, is unprecedented and unavoidable. "Multiculturalism" is generally used as a description of this distinctive cultural condition of late modern or postmodern societies. The term itself was initially introduced in Australia and Canada in the 1970s to refer to special policy arrangements aimed at protecting the distinctness of indigenous cultural groups and achieving their equal participation in civil and political life. However, its denotation rapidly shifted, first towards cultural diversity as a factual characteristic of societies, and secondly to social and political movements (especially in academia) as well as intellectual discourses which strive to promote the value of cultural differences or to claim public recognition for specific cultural differences. Thus, "multiculturalism" refers to cultural diversity not only as a factual characteristic, but also as a desired goal, as well as to various forms of public policy with regard to both of these, and to a number of normative theoretical stances or responses with regard to all three. Failure to note the variety of possible meanings can be misleading and has caused a lot of confusion in debates about multiculturalism.

Against this background, my aim in this short paper is very modest. First of all, I will attempt to distinguish between some of the meanings or versions of multiculturalism in order to identify the one which I regard as the most relevant for philosophical analysis. Secondly, I will argue that the justification offered for this meaning by its proponents or criticised by its opponents, namely the equality of cultures, is in fact not defensible. Thirdly, I will argue that it can and should, however, be justified and defended on the basis of an aporia of recognition which limits it but also enhances intercultural toleration.

1. The meanings of multiculturalism

As I have indicated, "multiculturalism" means very different things to different people. Improvising a bit on the distinctions initially drawn by Kincheloe & Steinberg (1997: 1-26) one can, for example, distinguish five normative theoretical stances or responses with regard to multiculturalism as a fact and/or a desideratum.

1.1 Eurocentric monoculturalism

This stance acknowledges cultural diversity but assumes the superiority of western culture and defends or propagates the assimilation of other cultures to a common western standard. There are all sorts of convincing arguments against this position, and postmodernism and postcolonialism have added extensively to the list, but the following critical flaws can be highlighted as the common basis of most critiques:

- The essentialist assumption that there is one, homogeneous, monolithic "Western culture" is conceptually naïve and empirically false.

- The claim to superiority can only be justified with reference to some supposed universal, objective, transcultural standard, but any such supposed standard inevitably presupposes (aspects of) a notion of western culture as being foundational; in other words, the claim to superiority amounts to a *petitio principii* and a lack of self-reflectiveness.

1.2 Liberal multiculturalism

This stance acknowledges cultural diversity but regards it as of lesser importance in comparison to the "natural equality" and "common humanity" of all human beings regardless of their cultural differences. This is also a very difficult position to defend, for a number of reasons, of which I will mention only two:

- The universalist notions of "natural equality" and "common humanity" and the concomitant liberalist philosophy of freedom, autonomy and natural human rights belong to an intellectual and historical development within western culture and are therefore themselves culture-specific. In other words, liberal multiculturalism is merely a disguised form of Eurocentric monoculturalism.

- The emphasis on "natural equality"and "common humanity" underestimates the human person's embeddedness in, and indebtedness and attachment to cultural forms of life.

1.3 Affirmative multiculturalism

This stance attempts to rediscover or reconstruct and revive some lost "essence" or repressed "identity" of a culture of one's own and claims "oppression privilege" or moral superiority for the members of this culture. Again, among many convincing points of critique against this position, two can be highlighted:

- The cultural "essence" or "identity" which is affirmed is conceptualised in essentialist, and often ethnicist ways, which makes affirmative multiculturalism just another, albeit "reversed", form of Eurocentric multiculturalism.

- The cultural "essence" or "identity" which is affirmed can be shown to be a romanticised fiction and to allow for no critical theoretical or empirical scrutiny. In other words, it functions as an ideological construct which defies the very value of cultural diversity in the name of which it is advocated.

1.4 Pluralist multiculturalism

This stance not only acknowledges cultural diversity but regards it as intrinsically valuable, a public good in itself, and therefore seeks to promote it. As I will argue later, this position is similar to and/or compatible with the form of multiculturalism which I regard as the most relevant for philosophical analysis and defence on condition that it is rectified on one point of legitimate critique, namely:

- The acknowledgement and promotion of the value of cultural diversity should be accompanied by a critical awareness of the way(s) in which cultural differences are often entangled with asymmetrical power relations of oppression and exploitation. The "celebration of difference" associated with pluralist multiculturalism should not function as an ideological counterpart or dialectical concealment of the perpetuation of powers such as the homogenising force of global capital.

1.5 Critical multiculturalism

As summarised by Degenaar (2001: 158), this stance "concerns itself with the power of self-reflection by means of which individuals become conscious of the way in which their consciousness has been formed by being socialised within a culture and by the asymmetrical relations of power in a multicultural context". Again, as in the case of pluralist multiculturalism, this position is compatible with the form of multiculturalism which I consider significant and defensible, but on condition that:

• The important and valid self-reflective awareness of multiculturalism as a condition of consciousness should be supplemented by an awareness of the limitations which it entails for interpersonal and intercultural recognition, communication and tolerance in the public domain.

Applicable and elucidatory as these distinctions and assessments may be, I would like to add two other variations which combine the normative sense of multiculturalism as a theoretical stance with the descriptive sense of multiculturalism as a state of affairs. Both cut across the distinctions made above.

1.6 *Mélange* multiculturalism

This is a "hodgepodge" multiculturalism. *Mélange* multiculturalism (Joppke & Lukes 1999: 8) refers to the experience and social reality of intercultural fusion and assimilation. As we all know from experience — and as many features of popular culture vividly demonstrate — the constant encounter with and exposure to cultural differences spontaneously result in dynamic and ongoing processes of transcultural osmosis which are experienced as very enriching by communities and individuals. Indeed, the intermingling and fusion of cultures in *mélange* multiculturalism may even take place within individual persons. As Amy Gutman (1993: 183) observed: "Not only societies, but people are multicultural". This form of multiculturalism may enhance and enrich the value systems of various cultural and religious communities and their individual members. It is also in tune with the increasingly cosmopolitan nature of what used to be "authentic

culture" and distinctive cultural identities. As Renato Rosaldo (1988: 87) observed even before the turn of the century:

> The view of an authentic culture as an autonomous internally coherent universe no longer seems tenable in a postcolonial world. Neither 'we' nor 'they' are as selfcontained and homogeneous as we/they once appeared. All of us inhabit an interdependent late twentieth-century world, which is [...] marked by borrowing and lending across porous boundaries.

Mélange multiculturalism thus serves as a critique on Eurocentric monoculturalism's presupposition of some "uncontaminated", pristine, homogeneous, supposedly superior western culture into which other cultures are supposed to be assimilated. But it also serves as a critique on affirmative multiculturalism's nostalgia for the lost "essence" or "repressed identity" of a culture of one's own. On the other hand, it is compatible with and strengthens the theoretical stances of liberal multiculturalism, pluralist multiculturalism and critical multiculturalism. However, the scope of *mélange* multiculturalism is seldom moral or political, but mainly aesthetic — it relates to music, fashion, literature, art, architecture and cuisine. As such, it is an empirical refutation of the thesis that cultures are incommensurable and that intercultural communication is impossible. But we also know that spontaneous intercultural fusion and transcultural osmosis are by no means guaranteed in multicultural societies, especially (so it seems) when it comes to religious and/or moral and/or ethno-cultural values. Rather than cross-cultural assimilation, intercultural tension and conflict often occur. This is not a "dialogue among civilizations", but what Huntington (1979) referred to as a "clash of civilizations". Often this is due to the intertwining of cultural and religious diversity with asymmetrical economic and political power relations, economic exploitation and exclusivist, oppressive political arrangements, along with human attitudes such as racism, xenophobia, intolerance and disrespect. But intercultural tension and conflict may (and often do) owe their existence to the exclusiveness of (aspects of) different value systems, or to the resistance of certain differences to cross-cultural integration. A more appropriate form of multiculturalism, and one which I regard as more relevant for philosophical analysis, is therefore one which not only acknowledges cultural diversity as a fact and a value on the one hand, along with cosmopolitanism on the

other, but which also acknowledges and provides for the mutual exclusiveness and conflicting nature of certain cultural differences. Borrowing the name from Joppke & Lukes (1999: 8), but giving it a slightly different content, I will call this form and meaning of multiculturalism "mosaic multiculturalism" and focus exclusively on it in the remainder of this paper.

1.7 Mosaic multiculturalism

This refers to a multicultural condition and response in which individuals and communities strive to protect (aspects of) their value systems from contamination or erosion by others and demand public recognition of those values. These demands are often accompanied by the presupposition, or the explicit contention that the recognition of the *equality of cultures* is a justified claim in a multicultural society. The question, though, is whether the demands for the recognition of (and special public protection for) cultural differences can be justified by an appeal to the equality of cultures, ie on the basis of cultural (and moral) relativism? I shall consider this question first.

2. The equality of cultures and the recognition of cultural differences

Mélange multiculturalism is popular and applicable to present-day societies because of its increasing drift towards cosmopolitanism, at least on the surface. Mosaic multiculturalism is popular and applicable because it expresses and articulates the increasing persistence in present-day societies of what appears to be the opposite of cosmopolitanism, namely the "politics of difference", which can also be termed the "politics of recognition".[1] This refers to the current awareness of people's attachment to cultural differences, and their consequent demands for public recognition (and protection) of these.

As indicated earlier, the meta-cultural presupposition that is generally invoked by advocates of mosaic multiculturalism in their de-

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1   The reference is of course to the important essay, *The politics of recognition*, by Charles Taylor. Cf Taylor (1994) as well as his earlier analysis in Taylor 1991.

fence of a "politics of recognition" is that the equal worth of different cultural and religious value sytems should be acknowledged and that demands for public recognition of cultural differences are therefore justified; moreover, that all cultural and religious value systems should be accorded equal respect.[2] I am convinced, though, that this presupposition can be shown to be invalid.

To begin with — and here I follow Charles Taylor (1994: 66-73) — the claim for the recognition of equality presupposes that it is possible to judge other cultures, *ab initio*, with reference to meta- or transcultural criteria, while such a judgement — if at all possible — can actually only be reached after a thorough study of other cultures. Only by means of such a study can a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer) occur and a new "vocabulary of comparison" develop that will enable one to articulate the contrasts. If and when a position is finally reached where it becomes possible to validate an initial assumption of equal value, such a position will encompass a new understanding of what is valuable:

2   Kolakowski (1990: 19-21) distinguishes between four meanings of what he calls "the principle [that] all cultures are equal". The first is that it really refers only to the artistic expression of cultures, according to which it can be determined that there are no supercultural, transcendental norms upon which aesthetic judgements may be based. This is less problematic, he contends, because "[in] the sphere of art, tolerance comes easily, either because we are indifferent or because we see nothing logically wrong in the confrontation of different aesthetic criteria". It is, however, highly problematic in a second case, when it is also regarded as applicable to "the spheres of religion and morality, law and intellectual rules" because these spheres concern "genuinely conflicting norms which cannot coexist in mutual indifference, to be exhibited side by side like museum pieces from different civilizations". All that it can mean in the latter case is a declaration of indifference — "I live in a particular culture, and other cultures do not interest me..." — rather than equality. It is therefore a misformulation fit only to be ignored. Thirdly, it may mean that there are indeed absolute, a-historical standards, and that even contradictions among cultural norms and practices in terms of these standards are all equal — a position that is evidently self-undermining and deserves no further attention. The fourth meaning is that "there are no absolute, a-historical standards by which to judge any culture".

> an understanding of what constitutes worth that we couldn't possibly
> have had at the beginning [...] (a) judgment [that we have reached]
> partly through transforming our own standards (Taylor 1994: 67).[3]

But, to push the argument even beyond Taylor's critique, what is really at stake in mosaic multiculturalism is precisely that which defies a common vocabulary and is disclosed in the very failure of horizons to fuse.

Secondly, the claim that the equality of the cultural difference at stake must be appreciated from the outset is self-undermining in the sense that the difference itself is implicitly annihilated. It is, after all, implied that those of whom recognition is demanded from the outset, are already possessed of the appropriate criteria of judgement. But what meta-cultural or culturally neutral criteria can those of whom recognition is expected have, other than those of their own cultural attachments and differences? In short: to claim recognition in advance for the value of that which is different is to subject it, from the outset, to precisely that from which it differs, a particular set of cultural criteria in terms of which it is expected to be valued and thereby to suspend its very difference. That which is different is then not appreciated in its own right, but only insofar as it appears as the exotic in the light of one's own and the similar:

> By implicitly invoking our standards to judge all civilizations and
> cultures, the politics of difference can end up making everyone the
> same (Taylor 1994: 71).

Another justification given for the thesis that cultures should be considered equal or should be accorded equal respect is therefore that it is not possible to take up a position from where the respective value or "truth" of cultures may be judged, because there is no culturally neutral set of criteria. Because of the absence or impossibility of such criteria, judgement should be suspended, resulting in equal respect. But the reasoning behind this imposition of the suspension of judgement cannot itself be separated from (values institutionalised

3 Without referring to Taylor, Procee (1991: 26) calls this position "communicative universalism", pointing on the one hand to the thought of Habermas and emphasising on the other that this still implies a form of universalism, although one that can take shape only in retrospect, after a process of intercultural communication.

in) a specific cultural practice, namely cultural anthropology (and epistemology and hermeneutics), in which a specific set of (Western) cultural differences is sanctioned above others! The claim that cultures are equal is a disguised performative contradiction. As Kolakowski (1990: 19) correctly argues:

> [T]he very act of suspending judgment is culturally rooted: it is an act of renunciation, possible only from within a culture which, through learning to question itself, has shown itself capable of understanding another. For this reason the anthropologist's stance is not really one of suspended judgment; what we call the spirit of research is a cultural attitude, one peculiar to Western civilization and its hierarchy of values. Whether I boast of belonging to a civilization that is absolutely superior, or on the contrary, extol the noble savage, or whether, finally, I say all cultures are equal, I am adopting an attitude and making a judgment, and I cannot avoid doing so.

Moreover, it does not follow from a plea for a suspension of judgement that all cultures may therefore be claimed to be equal. The *a posteriori* conclusion that cultural differences can only be understood or appreciated from inside, or that it is impossible to establish culturally neutral criteria, turns into the claim that the equality of cultures must be recognised *a priori*. This shift from an *a posteriori* conclusion (which might be valid) to an *a priori* premise is a fallacious deduction of a normative claim from a state of affairs.

There is, however, another important reason why the equality of cultures proclaimed in mosaic multiculturalism (as a justification for demands that cultural differences should be recognised) should be rejected. At this point the analysis shifts from a pure logical one to a more cultural-historical one. The question is namely: Why do people today demand recognition of cultural differences? One may argue that recognition has always been an essential and universal human need (Honneth 1995), and even that this need for recognition and the various ways and means in terms of which individuals and societies deal with it have always been structured or mediated by culture. "Culture" can, of course, also mean many different things, but in this context Tomlinson's (1999: 18) definition will suffice, namely

> [...] the order of life in which human beings construct meaning through practices of symbolic representation [...] The ways in which people make their lives, individually and collectively, meaningful by communicating with each other.

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But what exemplifies the present-day "politics of recognition" is not that recognition is mediated by culture, but that recognition is claimed for culture. In other words, the human need for recognition, previously mediated by culture — and differently mediated by different cultures — has been transformed into the need and demand for the recognition of cultural differences. Culture, previously the mediation of the need for recognition, has become the object of (the demand for) recognition. This, I would like to argue in accordance with a number of authors, is due to the global expansion of the cultural conditions of modernity.

Following and supplementing Charles Taylor's analysis, the genealogy of the present-day "politics of recognition" can be traced. First, modernity and the inauguration of democracy in Europe brought about the collapse of existing social hierarchies and established the equal dignity of citizens. Onto the right to equal dignity were grafted (by the end of the eighteenth century) the ideals of autonomy and authenticity, transforming the recognition of equal dignity into the universal recogntion of equal rights: the right to choose and realise one's own view of the "good" (autonomy) and the right of an individual or community to self-determination in accordance with a (supposed) unique pre-given "self" or "identity" (authenticity). In this way, what was achieved is twofold: first, the legitimation of the demand for the recognition of equal rights (whatever the differences), ie the appropriation of the right to difference; secondly, the legitimation of the demand for the equal recognition of the differences themselves.

To formulate it differently: the human need for recognition has always been culturally structured and mediated, but it was never directed at a particular culture or cultural contents/differences as in the case of the present-day "politics of recognition". An analysis of the genealogy of the "politics of recognition" (of which only the major conclusions could be discussed above) shows that the cultural-historical process of modernity converted the need for recognition into a right to be different and to claim recognition for the inherent value or significance of that difference, for example: a certain community culture; a language of one's own; a unique set of culturally specific values, symbols, codes, and/or rituals; a specific gender; an

alternative sexual preference and orientation, and so forth. In this way the anthropological-cultural practices of recognition have been transformed into the politics of cultural identity, into a power struggle to gain the protection of the right to cultural difference,[4] resulting in the codification (for example, constitutionally and institutionally) of culture-specific rights, typical of present-day multicultural states.[5] It encompasses a spectrum from the right to ethnic, religious and language differences through to culturally defined differences in gender and sexual preference. By means of this codification of the right to difference, the importance that people and communities attach to certain cultural differences, and their attachment to these differences, gain a measure of respect. This is what mosaic multiculturalism as a normative theoretical stance and public policy wants to achieve (and has succeeded in achieving in most liberal democracies). As Joppke & Lukes (1999: 1) remind us:

> […] courts in liberal states have been widely receptive to multicultural minority claims […] claims for minority rights are not an abstract imposition on liberal states, but reflective of the very practice of liberal states.

But protection of certain cultural-specific rights still does not answer to the need for the recognition of the inherent value of what is repre-

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4   Turner (1993: 423,424) makes a useful connection between multiculturalism as "one manifestation of the postmodernist reaction to the delegitimation of the state [...] a material decentering process grounded in the organization of capital on a global scale [...]" and this claim — in my words — of the right to cultural difference. Because of the coincidence of a whole series of factors the concept of culture is undergoing an important transformation in meaning, according to Turner, in that it is experienced, apart from nationality, as "a source or locus of collective rights to self-determination". The following formulation brings to light particularly well the correspondence between the thesis I posit here and the consequences of Turner's analysis: "Culture as such becomes a source of values that can be converted into political assets [...] Culture in these new senses, as a universal category distinct from, but subsuming, specific cultures, can be understood as the cultural form of the new global historical conjuncture: in effect, a metaculture [...]".

5   An example in this instance is the new South African constitution with its protection of cultural-specific rights and broad definition of categories against which discrimination is prohibited.

sented by such rights. To this distinction between the right to differ-ence and the claim to the recognition of the inherent value of the dif-ference itself, I will return shortly.

But to recapitulate briefly: the point of the discussion is that the equality of cultures proclaimed in mosaic multiculturalism (as a jus-tification for demands that cultural differences should be recognised) should be rejected, not only on logical grounds, but also on cultural-historical grounds. Why? Because the present global condition of cultural diversity and pluralism is the result of and was made pos-sible by the paradoxical way in which the life forms of modernity and the specific culture of the Enlightenment developed, first in Europe, and were subsequently disseminated worldwide, assimilated by other cultures, and are now finding their completion (which is at the same time an impasse) in postmodernity.[6] The present "politics of recog-nition", originally a specific cultural particularism, part of the life forms of modernity and the Enlightenment, found (at first) transcul-tural and then (finally) global legitimacy.[7] The result is accordingly not the eradication of cultural differences, but a more profound de-mand for the recognition of the right to difference. The life forms of modernity are the cultural preconditions for "the politics of differ-ence" and were assimilated transculturally all over the (post)modern world. As Huntington (1997: 78) puts it:

> Modernization, in short, does not necessarily mean Westernization.
> Non-Western societies can modernize and have modernized with-

6   By pluralism is meant not only societies marked by plurality or heterogeneity (a descriptive meaning) but also those in which diversity is experienced as a po-sitive value (a more normative meaning). This connects with Sartori (1997: 61), who draws a whole series of clarifying distinctions with reference to "pluralism" and "multiculturalism". He states, for instance, that: "[...] a pluralistic culture is all the more authentic to the extent that [...] difference (and not uniformity), dissent (and not unanimity), change (and not immutability) are 'good things' — these are the value-beliefs that properly belong to the cultural context of pluralism and that a pluralistic culture should convey in order to be true to its name".

7   Gellner argues the same point convincingly in more than one instance with re-ference to what he calls the culture of the Enlightenment, and more specifically with reference to the transculturality of modern science. For a concise formula-tion of this, see Gellner 1992: 58-9.

out abandoning their own cultures and adopting wholesale Western
values, institutions, and practices […] Modernisation, instead
strengthens those cultures […].

The reason for this is that the life forms of modernity could be
transmitted to other cultures and universally assimilated because
they do not mediate the attachment to specific values for which
people rely upon particular cultural life forms. The universalism of
equal rights, the universal recognition of human dignity, is an empty
universalism. It does not destroy cultural differences; it merely cre-
ates an existential vacuum that can be filled or covered up only by
falling back onto specific forms of particular communal experiences
of identity, attachments and values. In this way the global expansion
of modernity is a transcultural extension of the preconditions for cul-
tural differences to be claimed as rights and for the claim to equal
recognition for culturally specific values. Thus the current revivals of
various forms of cultural particularism are not the last spasms of out-
dated premodern attitudes or reactionary resistances to globalisation,
but the necessary supplement to modernity (Turner 1993: 423); they
are symptoms of the postmodern culmination and impasse of mo-
dernity. In this light postmodernity refers to the unique cultural con-
ditions of societies in which this ironic "logic" or dialectic of mo-
dernity has reached its zenith; in other words, in which the radical
pluralising of societies and cultures has been fully realised in and
through the same movement of transcultural and global expansion of
modernity.[8]

This explains why postmodern societies are characterised by the
condition and theoretical response of mosaic multiculturalism. At
the same time, it clearly demonstrates that the demands of mosaic

8   A similar understanding of the ambivalent "logic" or (what I prefer to call) the
     dialectic of modernity is forcefully advocated by Zygmunt Bauman in his view
     on the meaning of postmodernity and more specifically in his exploration of the
     nature and scope of postmodern ethics. As he formulates it in his introduction
     to *Postmodern Ethics* (Bauman 1993: 5): "[…] a society which is 'modern' […]
     constantly but vainly tries to 'embrace the unembraceable', to replace diversity
     with uniformity and ambivalence with coherent and transparent order — and
     while trying to do this turns out unstoppably more divisions, diversity and am-
     bivalence than it has managed to get rid of".

multiculturalism for the recognition of cultural differences cannot be justified on the basis of some supposed equality of cultures, but should rather be reduced to this dialectic of modernity.

3. The aporetic ground of multiculturalism

If the demand for the recognition of cultural differences cannot justly be based on the claim that cultures are equal, on what can it be based? I want to propose that it may be based on an aporia which also sets limits to the "politics of recognition" and casts a shadow over the prospects of our intercultural communication. Because of this aporia, the recognition of certain cultural differences becomes stultified in contemporary societies. This is what I wish to focus on in closing.

As we have seen, it is only possible to demand recognition for cultural differences because certain cultural forms of life, modernity, a specific particularism, have been universalised, so creating the space for an appropriation of the right to difference. Even those — for example, in deeply multicultural societies — who demand recognition for cultural differences which do not allow for the right to differ, do so on the grounds of the moral self-evidence or superior value enjoyed by the right to difference in (post)modern societies. The empty universalism of the recognition of equal rights created a global sounding-board against which particular claims for the recognition of cultural differences became audible and magnified. This means, however, that the claim for the recognition of cultural differences must be nuanced accordingly.

First, what can be rightfully claimed is the recognition of the right to different cultural values, but only to the extent that and insofar as these cultural values do not undermine the right to difference itself. Recognition of the right to differing values is, however, not yet recognition of the inherent worth of those values, ie recognition that people who are attached to those values are justly attached to what is in itself valuable. Merely to extend recognition of the right to difference is to abstract the difference itself from the value(s) that in the first place motivate(s) the appropriation of the right to difference and the claim for recognition. Or, put in another way, when certain cultural values are experienced by individuals and groups as so

significant that they demand others' recognition of them, and that they themselves demand the recognition of their right to difference with regard to these values, it is because they are convinced of the inherent worth of these values. They stand in such an immutable relationship to them that they not only demand recognition of their right to be different, but demand that the value of the difference itself should be recognised.[9]

It therefore seems that a second rightful claim to recognition follows from the nature of our relationship to such values, namely the claim to the recognition of the inherent worth of such values. If this is the case, it means that the recognition of the right to difference of an "other" cannot be abstracted from the recognition of the inherent value (in the eyes of the other) which is exactly what differs from the values to which we ourselves are inextricably attached.[10]

This can also be formulated in a different way: the values for which the other demands recognition are incarnated in concrete forms — a specific language, a certain code of conduct, a particular (and at first glance trivial) set of social conventions. But, similarly, the values of those from whom recognition is demanded are also incarnated; they cannot suspend them or ignore them within the "politics of recognition". The intercultural recognition reaches a stalemate in this aporia, on the rightfulness of an impossible claim or the impossibility to adhere to a rightful claim. The claim to recognise not only the right to difference, but the value of the difference in its incarnated form to the other herself appears as a rightful claim in the light of the immutable relationship within which we stand towards our own values. But the very incarnatedness of these values — our own unforfeitable passi-

9 I am following De Dijn (1997: 151-7; 1994a: 77-80; 1994b: 102-3) in this regard.

10 An example of such an immutable relationship, a relation pointing to the passivity of the subject, is our relation to our own name, which is in itself a meaningless word. Yet it is not all the same to us whether or not our mere right to a name, any name, is recognised. There is, after all, no other way to recognise somebody's right to a name than to recognise her name as inextricably hers, the name of her person. Even in cases of slander the issue is not that of a name, but rather of the immutable relationship between a person and the value he or she attaches to that name!

vity towards them — precludes any possibility of our truly recognising the inherent value of the difference of the other.

In this aporia we are confronted with our own finitude, with the realisation that the difference of the other is just as valuable to her as my difference from her is to me. It is not impossible for me to understand that the difference for which the other demands recognition has an inherent value. In certain cases, however, it may well be impossible for me to recognize this inherent value. The claim that the inherent value, the "truth" of the different values themselves, should be recognised, cannot be met. Here we encounter a limit to intercultural exchange and communication, an impossibility of mutual understanding and respect.

The limit of mosaic multiculturalism is this aporia of recognition. Because of this aporia (and not because of some objective, universal, transcultural meta-principles of evaluation), intercultural critique will and should be part of the intercultural exchange and multicultural existence. At the same time, because this aporia reveals our finitude, it provides a ground for intercultural tolerance — in fact, a better ground for tolerance than cultural relativism. Cultural relativism, which proclaims all cultures to be equal, underestimates the reality and significance of the "other" and therefore leads easily to a disregard of or indifference towards the "other". The aporia of recognition which only reveals itself when we really engage with the "other" in his/her incomprehensible "otherness" continuously confronts us with our finitude and can therefore create a shared consciousness of mutual respect. It sets a limit to mosaic multiculturalism. Nevertheless, it is this aporia, rather than cultural relativism, which provides the ultimate justification for mosaic multiculturalism.

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