

# Minoritarian Politics and the Pluralisation of Democracy

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The last few years have been witness to a revival in discussions of the relation between democratic theory and pluralism. The context of this revival is a complex and overdetermined questioning of our contemporary situation, marked by a simultaneous problematization and celebration of liberal democracy in the wake of the collapse of alternative social imaginaries since the events of 1989. On a politico-cultural level, this has engendered a vociferous debate concerning the presumed universality of liberal democracy and its ability to deliver equality to all, regardless of difference, whether the latter is thought in gender, racial, cultural or sexual terms. The subversion of the homogenising and totalising myths structuring modernity informing theories of democracy, has reopened the conceptualisation of the nature and character of democracy itself.

In this context I would like to engage in an excavating exercise in order to investigate to what extent problems addressed today under the rubric of »multiculturalism« are congruent with those addressed in »plural society« theories. This investigation takes as its starting-point the assumption that there is a need to break down the perceived conceptual dichotomy between so-called western, advanced capitalist societies, and the »third world« as well as the conceptual primacy given to the former. The aim here is to investigate what we can learn from the theorisation of »plural societies« in a reconsideration of our contemporary condition and to draw out a set of consequences for the discussions of pluralism, toleration and the limits of liberal democracy.

## *The multiculturalist challenge*

Multiculturalism – occupying a space similar to much feminist theorisation of the twentieth century<sup>1</sup> – in its questioning of the universalism of liberal democratic orders, has tended to re-centre theoretical discussion around the

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1. It has to be pointed out immediately that these are issues which are more than familiar to debates within feminist theory. The recent multi-cultural inflection of this debate, can in one sense be seen as yet another vindication of certain feminist criticisms of the presumed universality of liberal democratic values. For a discussion of the question in the context of feminist debates, see Anne Phillips (1993).

interrelated questions of pluralism, tolerance and democracy. The central demand of multiculturalists is for the recognition of distinct cultural identities of members of a pluralistic society in the public domain. At stake here is the opposition between a politics of universalism and a politics of difference, where the former emphasizes the equal dignity of all citizens, and fights for forms of nondiscrimination that are »blind« to the ways in which citizens differ, and the latter involves a redefinition of nondiscrimination as requiring that we make these distinctions the basis of differential treatment (Taylor 1992,39). While the politics of difference inevitably involves a detour through a universalist argument – *everyone* should be recognised for his or her unique identity – the demand is not for an ‘identical basket of rights and immunities’, but for the recognition of the unique identity of this individual or group (Taylor 1992,38). It thus asks that we give acknowledgement and status to something which is not universally shared. In contrast to the universalist ideal, the politics of difference aims not to bring us to a »difference-blind« social space, but on the contrary, to maintain and cherish distinctness, not just now, but forever (Taylor 1992,40).<sup>2</sup> Of course, this demand springs from, or reasserts itself against a dominant or hegemonic order or culture who claims to represent a putative universal. It involves thus, not only the demand for recognition of difference, but also a rejection of the universalist ethic of a ‘Eurocentric and Western cultural tradition’. In this sense, it raises new questions for debates on pluralism and point to the limits of liberal democracy in dealing with and giving adequate status to difference.

### *The pluralists revival*

The contemporary revival of pluralist theory can be seen from the number of publications in this field since the late 1980s (McLennan 1989; McClure 1992, Phillips 1993). As I have already argued, this renewal has to be placed in the context of debates on the limits of liberalism, or alternatively, in the context of its successful universalising and individualising ethic which, for multiculturalists, also constitutes the conditions of its failure.<sup>3</sup>

This contemporary interest in pluralism has tended to focus on and to reiterate the development of the pluralist tradition in its British, North American and European variants. Kirstie McClure, for example, has offered a rereading of

2. Taylor (1992,68-9) points out that the claim being made by multi-culturalists is not only one for recognising the potential of all different cultures, but that it rather calls for a judgement of equal value in an *a priori* fashion. This is problematic, for while it is tenable to demand that we approach the study of different cultures with a certain presumption of their value, it cannot make sense to demand, as a matter of right, that we come up with a final concluding judgement that their value is great, or equal to others«.

3. In this respect, see also Parekh in Held (1992).



the earlier pluralist traditions in terms of the question of subjectivity and political agency, issues which are central to our theoretico-political concerns. She outlines three waves of pluralist theory. The first and second are familiar versions. The first wave exemplified, *inter alia* in the works of Barker, Laski and Bentley, is articulated against unitary conceptions of state sovereignty and is thus critical of the sovereign state as the centre of political life. The second wave, as found in the works of Dahl and Truman, was closely linked to »empirical democratic theory«. Developed in opposition to sociological theories of a »power elite«,<sup>4</sup> it argued that political life consisted in the concatenation of autonomous and competing groups rather than in the socio-economic sovereignty of a dominant elite. The third wave, according to McClure, consists of post-Marxist attempts to forge an interconnection between post-structuralist critiques of identity and political theory, found, for example, in the works of Laclau and Mouffe.<sup>5</sup> To this can be added much of the contemporary theoretical debates informed by the conjunction between feminism and post-structuralism.

These waves of pluralist theory, on McClure's reading, contain both similarities and differences. All three variants are articulated in critical opposition to unitary and monolithic or totalising conceptions of the political domain (whether this totalising tendency is placed in the sovereign state or in a unique agency overseeing and determining the political process), and thus address issues of great concern to the contemporary debate on multi-culturalism and the politics of difference more generally. All three variants also insist on the irreducible plurality of the social, expressed in a multiplicity of social groups which have no necessary ontological grounding. Groups are seen, not as the expression of

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4. Elite theorists, unlike pluralists, see power as concentrated in the hands of a few. Among classical elitists, Pareto emphasized the psychological basis of the dominant group within society, Mosca highlighted socio-cultural factors, while Michels stressed the organisational basis of the elite group (Marsh 1983,12). It is necessary to note that certain theorists who started out as pluralists later modified their positions to be more in accord with elite theories. Charles Lindblom, for example, argues that there are potentially a limited number of groups in society which enjoy a privileged position in relation to government. Indeed, to Lindblom in advanced capitalist societies one group, business, enjoys a unique position, essentially because of its structural position in the economy. This means, that unlike other groups, business has two means by which to influence government – directly through interest groups, and indirectly through its structural position in the economy. This view differs from pluralism in two ways. It emphasizes the importance of a very limited number of groups and indeed singles out one group as being particularly important and capable of exercising a veto over government policy-making (Marsh 1983,13). This has led commentators like Marsh to re-classify Lindblom as a elitist theorist of the »veto group« variety.

5. McClure (1992,114) also includes Walzer and other cultural pluralists in this category, but argues that his work continues to circulate largely within the general problematic established by the preceding pluralist generations.

natural kinds, but as contingently constituted political entities, making the social subject the site of multiple and intersecting group membership. Analysis starts *in medias res*, focusing on the constellation and character of groups as they emerge.

The differences between these variants are traced to their respective constructions of the relationship between the plurality of the social and political struggle (McClure 1992, 116-120). The first generation of pluralists provided a means of resituating the political in the midst of the social by affirming the independence of group life from state determination, by disrupting the social atomism of liberalism and by demanding a rethinking of citizenship and reinvesting labour struggles with political significance. (The latter proceeded through a rejection of the liberal conception of geographical numerical representation in favour of occupation representation.) The second wave shifted the focus from the institutional context of the state to the terrain of the social itself by focusing on the contingent formation and expression of group interests around specific issues. It abandoned the terrain of political economy in favour of a wider focus on associational life no longer purely delimited by economic considerations. Both thus opened up successively broader spaces for the political expression of identities constructed within the plurality of the social. Yet, these particularistic identities were recuperated in different ways into a collaborative relation to the state. In the case of the first wave, by using the discourse of political economy to distinguish between public and private groups, and in the second by funnelling the political claims of all groups through institutional channels, addressing the state.

By contrast, the third wave of pluralist theorists focus, not upon the end-point of representations of »group interests«, but shifts attention to the political proper. That is, politics is no longer conceived as the projection of group interests onto the screen of state policy, but precedes this in the processes of articulation through which such identities and representations are themselves contingently constructed. There is, therefore, an explicit focus on the process rather than simply the outcome of »interest articulation«. This move extends the terrain of political agency in several ways. It sustains the capacity of the subject to make claims on behalf of any, or any combination of, its multiple dimensions, and instead of directing demands exclusively on the state, political contestation is expanded into the everyday enactment of social practices and cultural representations, resisting recuperation into the unifying mechanisms of interest group politics (McClure 1992, 123). Politics thus begins 'not with the object of constructing similarities to address rights claims to the state, but opens rather with the object of addressing such claims to each other, and to each »other«, whoever and wherever they may be' (McClure 1992, 123).<sup>6</sup>



This interesting re-reading of the tradition of pluralism, however, omits another strand of pluralist analysis: that developed with explicit reference to the »colonial« or »Third World«. This omission is particularly surprising in the context of the politics of multi-culturalism which inaugurated the contemporary recovery of pluralist politics. This tradition, I will argue, is especially relevant to our present concerns for, in contrast to the »interest«-based arguments of the two traditions outlined above, the latter explicitly addresses questions of identity formation.<sup>7</sup>

### *Recuperating the plural society thesis?*

My primary thesis with regard to the theory of »plural societies«, albeit discredited for its excessive sociologism, is that it offers an interesting precursor of contemporary debates on multi-culturalism, which can only be ignored at our own peril. In contrast to the excessive emphasis on the consensual and integrative basis of social orders found in the first two waves of pluralism discussed above, the pluralism characterised by the concept of »plural societies« — a deeply problematic concept but one which I will nevertheless use as a shorthand for the theorists I am about to discuss — took as its startingpoint colonial societies characterised by deep structural divisions and conflicts.

The »conflict« model of plural societies derives from Furnivall who applied the concept to the analysis of Burma and the Netherlands India. Furnivall argued that colonial domination imposed a Western superstructure of business and administration in a context of cultural, social and racial diversity, and forced a union on the different sections of the population. In this situation, there existed no common social will — also the focus of multi-cultural interventions — to hold the social order together. Furnivall elaborated the idea of a »medley« of different cultural groups to characterise this situation:

It is in the strictest sense a medley, for they mix but do not combine. Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the marketplace, in buying and

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6. Arditì (1993, 14) points to a problem with McClure's politics of »mutual address«. He argues that politics cannot only consist in the »mutuality of address« between citizens, for that potentially ignores the institutional sites of politics, which remain important even if we work with a post-structuralist conception of the subject: a politics of horizontal address within civil society thus overlooks the dangers of social balkanization.

7. One of the few contemporary articles which does address this question — with a focus on consociationalism — is that of Phillips (1993). She rightly emphasizes the distinction between the first two waves of pluralism and the consociational tradition, as one between and emphasis on »interest politics« and a politics concerned with »identity«. However, she fails to point out the fundamental distinctions between the conception of identity utilised in the consociational tradition, and that of contemporary »identity politics«.

selling. There is a *plural society*, with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit (Furnivall 1956,304).

Integration is not voluntary, but imposed by the colonial power and the force of economic circumstance. Furnivall emphasises the prevalence of dissensus: there is a failure of the common or social will not only in the plural society as a whole, but also within each of the plural sections which are atomised from communities with corporate life to crowds of aggregated individuals (Kuper 1969,11). Smith and Kuper extended Furnivall's initial analysis to all societies.<sup>8</sup> Yet, their own analyses were still focused on colonial societies and their distinctive characteristics. Smith, in contrast to Furnivall, focused his attention the political form of plural society as one of domination by one group, or more precisely, domination by a cultural minority. Cultural pluralism, defined solely in terms of institutional differences between cultural groupings, here is the major determinant of the structure of plural society, and it imposes the necessity for domination by one cultural section, thus excluding the possibility of consensus, or of institutional integration.<sup>9</sup>

Both Smith and Furnivall's respective analyses imply a distinction between two basic types of society, 'integrated societies' characterised by consensus and cultural homogeneity (or heterogeneity in the form of variations around a

8. Numerous attempts have been made to utilise pluralist categories for an analysis of South Africa (cf. Van den Berghe 1967, Kuper 1974, and Leftwich 1974). Both Kuper and Leftwich, for example, focus their analyses on the processes of colonisation through which corporate groups were incorporated differentially into the social order. This incorporation was dependent on the unequal dispersion of power amongst the different racial groups, favouring the interests of white colonists. In their respective analyses, both Kuper and Leftwich draw attention to the complex relationships between economic and political power, race and class determinants. Both, in the final instance and following the general trend of the pluralist tradition, see race as the organising principle of South African society (Howarth 1988,25). As Kuper argues:

'Given the difficulties of class interpretations of plural societies, it may be more productive to take, as a basis for the analysis, the racial or ethnic structure, emphasising the mode of differential incorporation. ... From this perspective there is no reason to anticipate that class divisions would have a crucial overriding significance.... Colonial oppression or racial domination is experienced as a totality, and stimulates a racial, or national response, transcending class divisions' (Kuper 1974, 224-5).

9. Smith (1969,440) later introduces a further set of pluralisms, namely social and structural pluralism. Social pluralism »is the condition in which institutional differentiations coincide with the corporate division of a given society into a series of sharply demarcated and virtually closed social sections or segments. Structural pluralism consists further in the differential incorporation of specified collectivities within a given society and corresponds with this in its form, scope and particulars«. Pluralist studies of the South African case have tended to employ the concept of structural pluralism as a product of differential incorporation along racial lines (Howarth 1988,23).



common basic institutional system), and 'regulated societies' characterised by dissensus and cultural pluralism (Kuper 1969, 14). This distinction is further overdetermined by a difference in political form: liberal democracy on the one hand, and sectional domination on the other.

The problems with this division into »types« of society is obvious and the modernisation paradigm in terms of which it is articulated has been decisively criticised.<sup>10</sup> I will therefore not focus on this area of criticism. Before further discussing some relevant examples of this type of analysis, it is important to immediately signify one crucial problem with this model which emerges from our present considerations. This concerns the fact that, not only are the characterisation of »plural societies« as deeply fragmented problematic, but the opposition established as such have come to be shown as untenable, for the mirror image of »deeply fragmented (colonial) societies«, namely the homogeneous »Western« societies such as the United States, have been shown similarly to lack the »integrative consensus«. To put it differently, the »integrative consensus« developed around universalistic individualist conceptions of citizenship, has proved to be problematic in its very success of excluding particularistic concerns from public political life.

More traditional critiques of the »plural society« analysis, concentrated on the problems of accounting for the existence of society in these accounts, and were developed from universalistic bases, whether this was the universalism of Marxist or of liberal analyses. Two different critiques, in addition to those already mentioned, has been made of the notion of »society« as utilised in this framework. Both concern the very possibility of society, albeit from very different perspectives. Basil Davidson (1969) and Ali Mazrui (1969), for example, put into question the concomitant use of the terms »society« and »plural«: in what way could these societies be both plural and societies? Indeed, if they are plural, can they be societies? Put differently, if the case of »plural societies« are characterised as extreme cases of total identities, of self-contained cultural systems where the contact between groups are minimal, how can one talk of society or of any unity at all? In other words, these societies lack any means by which a larger solidarity or universality may be created and/or theorised. The second critique of their use of »society« is articulated from the perspective of the third wave pluralism. A fundamental theoretical and philosophical assumption made by most pluralists (and in this sense, the critique holds also for first and second wave pluralism) is that society presents itself as a valid object of analysis, an object with an *a priori* intelligibility and determined character. That is, society is regarded as stratified in a particular way and has certain dominant characteristics around which

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10. See in this respect Slater (1992) and Laclau (1977).

analyses may be structured (Howarth 1988,27). It is clearly necessary to take on board this criticism, since its consequences are far-reaching: if society and modes of social division are not given in an *a priori* fashion, then the focus of analysis has to shift toward the very *production* of those divisions, which may or may not be along cultural (racial or ethnic) lines.

This criticism also impacts directly on the cultural pluralists' conception of subjectivity. They assume the salience and givenness of cultural and racial divisions by drawing, for example, on Clifford Geertz's concept of »primordial sentiments« which constitute the particularity of the plural communities, and which thus pre-exist their incorporation into »society« (Kuper 1969,472). This problem also extends to their inability to address conflicts and changes *within* »racial« groupings (Howarth 1988,26).<sup>11</sup> One cannot therefore accept the very basis from which this analysis proceeds, namely the assumption of an automatic identity, rather than an identification with, respective cultures and or »races«. As was pointed out earlier with respect to the third wave pluralism, the construction of identities constitutes the political problem *par excellence*.

Having said this, the advantage of this type of analysis is that it raises, against itself so to speak, the very question of the political. Since the incorporation into a social order is not given *a priori*, it becomes the first of problems to be addressed. However, this radical dimension is ultimately recuperated by the desire to achieve integration into the overall »developmental« nature of the analysis. The problem for cultural pluralists remains one of how to think 'evolutionary [sic] change from cultural pluralism and divisive conflict to political pluralism and equilibrium' (Kuper 1969a,16). The model of a homogeneous society in which pluralism becomes concomitant with a dispersion of power and a struggle between independent political parties and groups as associated with »Western liberal democracies«, remain their object of desire. This object, however, as we know, has shown itself to be less than perfect and to raise anew the question of »incorporation« into a social order so starkly posed by the cultural pluralists.

Perhaps M.G. Smith's initial formulation of the universalism-particularism dimension of modes of incorporation may still be enlightening here. Smith (1969,415f) puts it in the following terms: a distinction can be made between structures in which individuals are incorporated directly, on identical conditions, as citizens, and structures in which they are incorporated indirectly, through their sectional identification, for example, as members of an ethnic group. The former is described as a *universalistic* mode of incorporation, while the latter may take two forms, either *equivalential* incorporation, where

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11. Similar problems are to be found in the works of contemporary communitarian theorists.



society is structured as an order of equivalent but exclusive corporate sections, and *differential* incorporation, where it is constituted as an order of structurally unequal, exclusive, corporate sections. (Smith equates differential incorporation as structural pluralism.) Indirect incorporation, both in its equivalential and differential forms, are *particularistic* since individuals are incorporated through their membership of sectional units. In these terms, contemporary multi-culturalist demands can be characterised as demands for equivalential incorporation within an already existing universalistic, democratic order.

This then brings us back to the other traditional critiques of the »plural society« version of pluralism. From a Marxist point of view, it has been argued that the particularistic focus as such is problematic. Legassick (1977,48), for example argues, that there is a 'universal dependence of all producers on one another', and that it is this universal aspect – class – that ought to take precedence in analysis of social division. Similarly, liberal commentators have been critical, then as they are now, of any mode of incorporation which appeals to particularistic identities. Indeed, for them the demand is simply misplaced. The impersonality of public institutions is the price we, as citizens, ought to be willing to pay for living in a society that treats us all as equals, regardless of our particular ethnic, religious, racial or sexual identities (Gutman 1992,4). Both these critiques remain, per definition, incapable of articulating the problem of particularism as raised in this version of pluralism. They simply legislate it out of existence.

There is one further dimension of the question of »incorporation« which should be addressed before we move on to a discussion of a set of particular cases. This concerns the dimension of *force* argued to be essential to the constitution of forms of unity in plural societies. Again, our response to this argument has to be ambiguous, for it is clear that this is not only a characteristic of so-called deeply divided societies, but of society as such. The very conceptual separation between »force« and »consent« has to be problematised.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, if one takes it in a literal fashion, it is clear that the discussion of force here is related to the problem treated earlier, namely the impossibility of society. If there is an absolute absence of »common values« or a social will, then the only solution for the constitution of society, is its constitution by means

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12. The strong distinction between force and consent can be problematised in so far as the establishment of any particular consensus always rules out other possibilities, and thus involves an element of force. This is at its clearest in conceptions of society organised around the premise of the possibility of reaching a »total« consensus. In such a case, the very need for the freedom to take decisions would be eliminated. In that case we will no longer call such a society »free«. The relation between force and consent is thus one, not of mutual exclusion, but of mutual implication.

of brute force.<sup>13</sup> While Marxist and liberal accounts legislate particularism out of existence, cultural pluralism, on the other hand, remains unable to think the constitution of any form of universality, thus ending up with force as the only solution to the problem of the impossibility of society. However, more contemporary versions of cultural pluralism have sought to overcome this problem by means of a set of »institutional fixes«. In this regard, it is interesting to look at the case of consociationalism.

### *Consociationalism and cultural pluralism*

In the case of consociational theories, the coercive state is replaced by an institutional fix in the form of the development of constitutional mechanisms which are to provide the unity – »society« – which otherwise remains an elusive object. At this point it may be useful to compare two historical cases, that of South Africa and the Netherlands. Pluralism, in the South African case, has been almost wholly identified with the version of »plural (deeply divided) societies« discussed above, thus making it equivalent to »apartheid by other means«. Yet, if there is a relation between the recognition of the plurality of the social, and form of democracy, it is necessary to find a way to re-introduce the discussion of pluralism without falling into the obvious problems so starkly shown in consociational models of democracy.

Cultural pluralism, in its consociational form, started its career in South Africa in opposition to Westminster models of »majoritarian« democracy.<sup>13</sup> Lijphart, for example argued, and this was quickly taken up by the regime, that

*... in divided societies, majoritarian democracy is totally immoral, inconsistent with the primary meaning of democracy, and destructive of any prospect of building a nation in which different peoples might live together in harmony (1977b, 115).*

Moreover, in the South African context, both the alternative solutions to the problem of society – assimilation and partition – was argued to be 'impractical' (but not immoral!). It was held that consociational democracy, of which we still find strong traces in the present National Party constitutional propos-

13. The manner in which consociationalism was introduced into the South African political landscape is too complex to discuss here in full. Suffice it to say that since 1978, debates were characterised by discussions of the »plural« nature of South African society. Consociation was explicitly introduced in NP discourse during the late 1970s, and continued to inform – despite denials on their part – the shaping of the 1983 constitutional model, based on »segmental authority« and a division between »own« and »common« affairs. This occurred in a context in which the nature of the segments themselves were rearticulated from a »volk«-based nationalism to one of a »multi-cultural« society in which there existed only »minorities«. For a fuller discussion of this, see Norval (1993, 351-363); and Frankel (1980, 473-94).



als, gave us four crucial principles which could ensure »real« democracy: coalition government, a mutual veto, proportionality and autonomy of segments.<sup>14</sup> (The latter provided for the maximum devolution of powers of decisionmaking, thus protecting the status quo.) While the preconditions for consociationalism as stipulated by Lijphart clearly did not hold for the South African case,<sup>15</sup> Lijphart nevertheless propagated it as an ideal solution for the »problems« of South Africa. It was duly taken up, not only by the regime, but also by a number of academics who claimed that consociationalism, with its 'recognition of racial, ethnic or other sub-cultural differences', and its emphasis on 'elite pacting' in order to transcend societal cleavages, was more than appropriate to address the problems of a deeply divided society such as South Africa.

Consociationalism in the South African case has been decisively discredited, and for obvious reasons.<sup>16</sup> Most criticism, however, took one of two forms. It either focused on institutional and constitutional questions, such as the absence of a role for a strong opposition in a model aiming at »consensus« politics, or it denied the very problematic around which this theory was articulated in the first place: the question of particularity in a democratic

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14. It is important in this respect to note that consociationalism, for Lijphart, is not a specific institutional framework. Consociation is regarded as a form of decisionmaking within a democratic polity, and it thus can be made applicable within unitary, federal and other state forms. It is precisely in this sense that the recent NP constitutional proposals still display the deep traces of consociational forms of decisionmaking.

15. These are:

»... a multiple balance of power among the segments of a plural society in which no segment has a majority and the segments are of approximately equal size; a relatively small population; external threats that are perceived as a common danger by the different segments; the presence of some society-wide loyalties, the absence of extreme socio-economic inequalities among the segments ... and prior traditions of political accommodation that predispose the decision-making by grand coalition method« (Lijphart 1977b, 124).

16. Critics of consociationalism in the South African situation have tended to focus on the following problems: (1) the relation between »unifying« elite behaviour and political stability is questioned on the grounds that political stability is a result, rather than the cause of elite accommodation; (2) Brian Barry argues that elite accommodation is possible only where sectional differences are organisationally, rather than ethnically based; (3) South Africa lacks a tradition of elite accommodation, as well as of a unifying conception of an »external threat« (Venter 1982, 286-7); (4) more radical critics also questioned, rightly, the very emphasis on elite politics at the expense of mass participation; (5) consociation can be used to control and prevent processes of radical change and to maintain the status quo (Frankel 1980, 482); and (6) it has authoritarian implications, not only in its definition of executive powers, but also in its acceptance of the (then) existing statutory classification of the various »racial« population groups. In fact, the South African political landscape not only lacks all the crucial requirements specified by Lijphart, but the traditions of resistance also militates against the very conservative nature of the consociational model of politics.

society. In the latter case, consociationalism was rejected as »apartheid by other means«, and rightly so. However, this critique also swept the *problem* under the carpet, for it provided a strictly *universalistic* answer to a particularistic demand. The relevance of any form of division was denied, and the unitary status of South African »citizenship« (nationhood) was affirmed in the process. While this response may be understandable in the South African context, it nevertheless ignores the disputed relation between democracy and particularity, assuming democracy to be equivalent to strict universality.

At this point it has to be asked if the problems experienced in the South African case, is inherent in the consociational model or not? To put it differently, is the South African case once again to be read as one more example of an exceptional or unique nature, perverting the logics of democracy as it had perverted the language of nationalism? Or does it show something inherent in the consociational model of democracy and pluralism, something which was not evident in its original conditions of articulation? In this respect, it may be useful to compare it to the Dutch case, both in its historical development and in contemporary debates.

Historically, the pillarization (*verzuiling*) of the Dutch polity arose from an attempt to accommodate major religious differences via a vertical form of differentiation. Idealiter, each citizen found her position in specific voluntary organisations which belonged to her denomination (e.g. a Catholic or Calvinist trade union, youth organisation, educational system, and so forth), and everyone was, according to this model, secluded in her »pillar«, and did not entertain relationships with members of other pillars (Berting 1993,2). At the top level of the political system a series of rules had been worked out that implied a lot of autonomy for each pillar with respect to the organization of education, religious activities, and to a certain degree, labour relations (*ibid.*). In Lijphart's terms, this is a consociational democracy in which incorporation occurs along equivalential lines, thus recognising particularity in the very moment of constituting an equal order. (It has to be pointed out that this arrangement was accompanied, and possibly made possible by a relative absence of strong nationalist sentiments.)

A number of important remarks have to be made with respect to the very notion of pillarization and its historical development. For our purposes, I would like to focus on the relation between »emancipation« and pillarization. It was through pillarization that catholic and neo-calvinist minorities acquired a power base in society, from where they began to integrate and to »emancipate« themselves (Zijdeveld 1993,23). Two more contemporary phenomena are of importance in this respect: they are, the possibility of de-pillarization on the one hand, and of renewed pillarization of minority groupings on the other.



Historically Dutch society has experienced several attempts at de-pillarization, most notably an unsuccessful attempt just after the Second World War, and again during the 1960s. However, of more interest in the context of debates on multiculturalism and pluralism, is the possibility for additional pillarisation of sections of especially the immigrant population. Uitterhoeve (1990,33-5) discusses this possibility in the following terms:

Incidentally, it is quite possible that The Netherlands will witness an Islamic pillarisation in the near future, much comparable to the Catholic and Neo-Calvinist pillarization of yesteryear. As small as this »denomination« is at present, the Islam is in fact the second religion of the Netherlands now. It is possible that the as of yet very small but quantitatively growing Islamic minority will follow the same route in its emancipation within Dutch society. ... This Islamic mini-pillar ought to transcend ethnic differences, as there are Turkish, Moroccan, Moluk and Surinam, and (very few) Dutch muslims in the Netherlands.

Indeed, for Zijderfeld (1993,32), this possibility of renewed pillarization offers, not only an example of how the Dutch have come to organise their particular society. He envisages, not as a result of some »liberal open-mindedness and longing for an easy-going harmony', but 'because there is no other way to survive collectively', the possibility that the Dutch experience of pillarization may 'function as a kind of model for societies that try to combine pluralism and democracy within a cultural context that is based upon and maybe even in the grips of many tension and conflicts, yet in the end remains always geared towards consensus and cooperation'. While this question obviously goes beyond what can be addressed here, the example does raise a set of important issues which I would like to address, however, briefly. In the first place, the conditions for renewed pillarization is obviously strongly linked to, not only the Dutch historical experience, but also to their marked traditional tolerance. Contextual factors ought thus to predominate in any discussion of this sort. Second, and more to the point, it has to be asked what sort of »emancipation«, and by implication, argument for pluralism, is at stake here? It seems, both from wider multicultural discussions, and from the case under discussion, that the subject to be emancipated is one embedded in her religion and/or culture. That is, we deal here with a situation in which a given identity, not identification, is at stake.

In that sense, and in spite of its possible emancipatory effects and the explicit recognition that pillars can always change and be multiplied, I would argue that the multicultural pillarization is subject to exactly the problems identified earlier with the »cultural pluralists« of the plural society tradition. (It also displays the same problems that communitarians like MacIntyre has around

the question of »tradition«.) Moreover, while certain »emancipatory« effects may follow, these remain caught within a tradition of pluralism which does not recognise the multiplicity of subject positions, and therefore of possible identifications which may be exhibited by any one subject. To put it differently, while it goes some way towards addressing the problem of a recognition of particularity within a (consociational) democratic polity, it cannot negotiate the question of particularities in a satisfactory manner for it excludes the possibility of other and cross-cutting particularities from assuming more/equal significance.

Moreover, as a number of commentators have pointed out, it does not solve, or indeed even begin to address, the real problem at stake here:

*Can people ... morally endure and politically afford it to continue to be »liberal«, »open-minded«, »anti-ethnocentric«, »culturally pluralistic«, »relativistic« all the time? (Zijderveld 1993,31)*

This issue cannot be addressed from within the domain of »pluralist politics« itself, for it raises the question of the limits of pluralism itself.

### *The limits of pluralist politics*

A conception of the limits of pluralist politics points to two intimately related problems. As I have argued at the outset, a major problem with discussions of consociationalism is the tendency to provide »institutional fixes« for the problem of the »impossibility of society«. That is, it tends to put forward procedural mechanisms for the creation and maintenance of a »social will«, unified at least minimally around the »rules of the game«. As numerous critics have argued, consociationalism takes what is to be regarded as the outcome of such politics as its startingpoint. However, even more is at stake here. I would argue that a procedural focus presupposes some agreement on a democratic ethos, and cannot be argued to create such a consensus. Consociationalism, and by implication any approach which privileges procedures, is deeply flawed in that it fails to address its wider conditions of possibility adequately and, in doing so, misunderstands the very nature and character of politics. Politics is not, as proceduralists would have it, simply a matter of getting the right mechanisms in place. While these are important, and no democrat would deny that, the exclusive focus on procedures ignores the deeper need for the constitution of an ethos of politics – in this case a democratic ethos. Moreover, those who conceive of the pluralism of modern democracy as being total and as having as its only restriction an agreement on procedural rules, do not realize that there can never be pure, neutral procedures without reference to normative concerns (Mouffe 1992,12). To acknowledge this is to recognise that extreme



forms of pluralism, which emphasize and valorize all differences as equally valuable, are untenable within a *democratic* horizon.

The public recognition of difference and plurality – demanded by both multiculturalists and consociationalists – is not in and of itself capable of producing more democratic settlements in our contemporary world. As the case of South Africa, as well as certain radical forms of multiculturalism clearly show, much depends on the precise political articulation of such demands. I have argued that some forms of contemporary multiculturalist arguments tend to display problems similar to that exhibited by earlier cultural pluralist. Put bluntly, the essentialisation of identity and the concomitant politico-cultural separatism does not seem to be the way forward towards a more democratic and plural liberalism.

As Kymlicka (1989) and others have argued, several problems remain to be addressed with regard to any form of »group« recognition in the public domain. The nature and constitution of the »group« raises issues concerning exclusivism and closure in identity, which may have anti-democratic consequences on a number of different levels. Moreover, it is unclear who is to decide which differences are the fundamental or important ones in the delimitation of such identities. These problems are but samples of the kinds of questions that would have to be addressed in a pluralist democratic theory, and they are compounded if one emphasises a non-essentialist pluralism which takes the fluidity of identity seriously. As I have pointed out earlier, nor can these problems be solved by a »procedural fix«, for the latter does not begin to address the issue of criteria for the discrimination between differences. One cannot stand indifferent in the face of all differences, and one is therefore compelled to delimit the realm of plurality. Pluralism itself – not even of the post-structuralist variety – cannot provide one with the conceptual tools and guidelines to do so. A politics based on the mere pluralisation of differences does not take into account the fact that for any order to constitute itself, certain limits have to be drawn, and those limits are not given naturally. The conditions of existence of an object called society, and the construction of a social will, involves both the constitution of a domain of difference and the drawing of frontiers, delimiting what can be accepted within a particular order. It is here that pluralism reaches its limits, and it is also here that the need for a *radical democratic* pluralism needs to be asserted.

The development of a democratic ethos, in this sense, has to start from the presumption of the *potential* value of all/other cultural practices and conceptions of the good. However, as Taylor (1992,68-9) argues, it does not make sense to demand, in addition, an *a priori* positive valuation of such differences. Thus, while starting from an openness to the other, to difference as such, a

democratic pluralism cannot assume that all others are of necessity to be accorded equal status. If we are not to be led into a bad relativistic universe in which we no longer have the possibility of discriminating between different forms of identification, the logics of democracy, equality and liberty – albeit in rearticulated form – have to be brought into play as principles guiding our political practices.

Moreover, the assertion of an »openness« to an other, in and of itself, is not unproblematic. Some theorists have argued that the mere recognition of difference already involves a realisation of the contingency of all identity, and that this realization, without further ado, will lead to the taking of a 'reflective distance' to one's own identity. It is thus not only the false universality of dominant forms of identification which are being put into question in this process, but also the valorisation of the identity of subordinate and marginalised groups. Susan Bordo, for example, argues with respect to feminist critiques:

Where once the prime objects of academic feminist critique were the phallogentric narratives of our male-dominated disciplines, now feminist criticism has turned to its own narratives, finding them reductionist, totalizing, inadequately nuanced, valorising of gender difference, unconsciously racist, and elitist (Bordo 1990:135).

The same argument has been presented in terms of the problem of multiculturalism and a futural politics of difference. The recognition of one's own finitude – whether one belongs to a dominant or marginalised group – provides the basis for a radically pluralist and democratic politics. This, however, is by no means a generally accepted position. Others have questioned the validity of such weakening of identity, arguing that, just when marginal and oppressed groups are asserting their rights as political subjects is no time to deconstruct these identities. To do so would be to become complicit with an agenda which aims 'to restrict both the scope of such rights claims and the potential power of those actively beginning to advance them' (McClure 1992,108). McClure, while being critical of this reading, nevertheless does not give attention to the possible undemocratic consequences of the assertion of a post-modern »quotidian« politics.

The issue at the heart of this contestation is the following: does the deconstruction of identity, the recognition of an essential openness to an other, in and of itself lead us to a more democratic politics? We need to proceed with some caution here, for the articulation and subversion of any identity is an act of power, and power is unevenly distributed throughout society. The call for the weakening of marginal identities need to take this into account. As both Bordo and Phillips argue, to deny the difference between dominant and subor-



dinate identities, is to fall back into the complacencies or the older pluralisms (Phillips 1993, 159; Bordo 1990, 149).

But perhaps this is to approach the question from the wrong side, for if certain trends in, *inter alia*, contemporary feminism as well as the renewed theorisation »racial« politics is to be taken as an example, it is not the case that there has been a reluctance to assert the multiplicity and complexity and ultimate openness of all identity. It is thus no longer a question as to whether marginal groups »ought« to take on board third wave pluralism and its concomitant conception of subjectivity. Some have and will continue to do so, while others have nostalgically chosen to retreat into a politics of the enclave to ensure the recognition of their particular difference. Rather, the issue is and remains one of the subversion of the surity and complacency of dominant discourses, for it is precisely these discourses which have refused this weakening of identity. In order to foster a politics of difference which will succeed in avoiding a futile separatism as well as in challenging dominant discourses, it is necessary that one does not remain on the terrain of the simple assertion of difference and particularity.

The recognition of finitude, which underlies the openness to difference, is merely the point from which we have to begin to address anew the questions posed to us in the late twentieth century. Finitude, in this sense, points *not* to a mere pluralisation of identities and of particularities, but to the need constantly to renegotiate the difference between universality and particularity. To remain on the terrain of the latter, which has so decisively problematised the former, would be to open ourselves to a fundamentally undemocratic politics. Yet, the questioning of forms of universality by the emerging particularisms of our time, should not either lead to a simplistic reassertion of universality as such. It is only in the terrain of the tension between the two – in the terrain of finitude proper – that we will be able to renegotiate, not only spaces for the democratic recognition of particularity, but also for the revalorisation of quasi-transcendental universalisms from which an more egalitarian democratic project can arise. Avoiding the politics of the enclave while recognizing the salience of difference, constitutes the political question *par excellence* of our times. At stake here is the kind of politics that can recognize and legitimate difference while resisting fragmentation into discrete and local identities. No easy procedures can be provided for the development of this politics. There are no simple answers ready to hand. However, as Phillips argues, it is better to be without easy answers than to cling to ones that were wrong. What is clear, is that no answers will be forthcoming unless we engage with the construction of a democratic ethos from which a quasi-universalistic project of a politics of finitude becomes thinkable.

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