

# Multiculturalism or Hybridisation? Cultural Mixing and Politics\*

By PAOLO GOMARASCA

(Catholic University of the Sacred Heart of Milan)

## Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyse the recent debate on the end of multiculturalism. It has become a commonplace to say that multiculturalism has failed because of its presumed differentialism, i.e. its tendency to conceive different cultures as cognitive islands. The competing model is characterised by an intercultural approach. The article firstly intends to demonstrate that this is a false alternative within limits. Contrary to popular caricature, one version of multiculturalism is in fact attuned to the emphasis on cultural exchanges and connections. The problem is that the differentialist version has become the standard version of multiculturalism. That is why the article further argues for the importance of the concept of hybridisation as a way of moving beyond the controversy over multiculturalism's supposed failures. Hybridisation suggests one aspect which can be considered relevant: Cultures are originally and intrinsically intertwined. Finally, the article investigates the political implication of this concept of culture and tries to justify the request that cultural mixing processes should be channelled within the political framework of democracy, especially at the level of civil society.

**Keywords:** multiculturalism, hybridisation, cultural mixing, civil society

## Introduction

What is the political implication of cultural hybridisations? Is it possible (and politically justifiable) to implement democracy by following a 'mestizo logic'? In order to address this question, I shall start, in section one, by tackling the issue of the so-called backlash against multiculturalism and the competing model of interculturalism. With respect to this opposition, the first step of my argument is to justify hybridisation as a third approach to cultural diversity. In my opinion, the result of the discussion between opponents and proponents of multiculturalism seems to have

come to a dead end due to the fact that 'both opponents and proponents of multiculturalism' – as Benhabib suggests –, 'despite disclaimers to the contrary, continue to defend a faulty understanding of cultures as unified, holistic, and self-consistent wholes' (Benhabib 2002: 86). Hence, section two sketches the phenomenon of cultural hybridisation and advocates for an idea of culture as a fabric of narrative processes. This leads to the second step of my argument: If culture, as hybridity suggests, 'is made *through* change' (Modood 2007: 86), I believe it is important to examine the specific contexts and conditions in which cultural changes occur. In particular, my theoretical concern is with two basic conditions of democracy: a) civil society, and b) 'good governance'.

a) In section three, I discuss the key role for the associational sphere of 'civility', where 'new forms of sociability and solidarity' (UNESCO

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2009: 237) can generate cultural hybridisations through dialogue and cooperation.

b) In section four, I further argue that this human-rights-based dimension of hybridity in the sphere of civil society needs to be complemented by an institutional framework: That is why emphasis is also placed on 'good governance', i.e. the standards of democratic legitimacy, especially openness, participation and accountability. The idea is that civil society must itself satisfy this set of standards. This democratic consistency should ensure that hybridity can play a role in building a unitary political community through diversity.

### 1. 'Requiem' for multiculturalism?

'Multiculturalism is dead': thus announced the *Daily Mail* in July 2006. Rather than giving cause for mourning, this state of affairs is a case for relief, even if mixed with a touch of resentment at this far too late demise of the concept of multiculturalism, not to mention at the introduction of the concept in the first place.<sup>1</sup> This global refusal would remain inexplicable without the securitisation caused by the fear of terrorism, as argued by Aggestam and Hill (2008: 106). Fragmented pluralism, considered a necessary outcome of multiculturalism, threatens social and political cohesion. And diversity without unity seems the breeding ground for communities and groups whose loyalty to a transnational religion might lead them into acts of violence against their own fellow citizens.

The test of this generalised backlash (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010) is that even some of the supporters of multicultural policies are now convinced they made the wrong choice. Noteworthy, from this point of view, is Taylor's recent

stance: With reference to the position he held in *The Politics of Recognition* (1994), and specifically in regard to the case of Québec, Taylor has declared 'a rejection of Canadian multiculturalism and a call for interaction and integration' (Bouchard and Taylor 2008: 19). That is to say that, owing to the recognition of minority rights, the diversity between groups has become an obstacle to cultural exchanges and then a serious claim against the originally advocated societal integration.

The domain of political correctness is now occupied by another discourse, with the intention to pay more attention to the relation between persons from different cultures, without obviously denying their dissimilarity. As a consequence, it is trendy (at least in Europe) to speak the language of interculturality, a concept somehow naïvely contrasted with the old multicultural refrain, as happens – for instance – in the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue. As to the shareable goal to build an inclusive society based on the value of communication, the White Paper states that the intercultural dialogue 'is understood as an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect' (Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs 2008: 10).

There is no doubt that 'open and respectful exchange of views' and 'mutual understanding and respect' are essential building blocks of democratic society. In particular, it is impossible for dialogue to take place in the absence of respect for freedom of opinion and expression. However, it may possibly be considered naïve to think, as it seems in certain parts of the document, that equal respect is a sufficient condition 'to ensure that dialogue is governed by the force of argument rather than the argument of force' (Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs 2008: 19). 'Freedom – as clearly stated by UNESCO (2009: 198) – is meaningless so long as the necessary conditions for its effective exercise have not been ensured.' From this practical point of view, I think that Arendt's view is correct: 'not the loss of specific rights, but the loss of a community

<sup>1</sup> It can be useful to suggest a shared definition of multiculturalism and some key features regarding the state of the art. As clearly stated by Song, 'multiculturalism is a body of thought in political philosophy about the proper way to respond to cultural and religious diversity. Mere toleration of group differences is said to fall short of treating members of minority groups as equal citizens; recognition and positive accommodation of group differences are required through group-differentiated rights, a term coined by Will Kymlicka' (Song 2010).

willing and able to guarantee any rights whatsoever' (Arendt 1973: 297) is the fundamental deprivation of human rights. The deprivation of 'a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective', continues Arendt, turns freedom of opinion into a fool's freedom, for nothing 'the others' think matters anyhow. That is why I believe that the crucial point of the White Paper is rather when it identifies the 'key role for the associational sphere of civic society where, premised on reciprocal recognition, intercultural dialogue can resolve the problems of daily life in a way that governments alone cannot' (Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs 2008: 20). As I will try to demonstrate in the conclusion, 'civil society' can function exactly as the place advocated by Arendt, where we ('us' with 'the others') can collaborate in building a common understanding and realise practices of coexistence.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore I consider 'civil society' a stronger starting point than a generic call to intercultural dialogue when it comes to finding a tool to foster 'a sense of common purpose' (Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs 2008: 17). That call, although necessary, is at risk of remaining abstract, purely theoretical. Consequently, it is not sufficient, in my opinion, for replying to an anti-Kantian objection like that of Iris Young, who invites to discuss (that is, 'dispose of') the oppressive (western) chimera of 'a mythical common good' (Young 1990: 119): If indeed the common good is rejected as a sign of white/bourgeois domination over the world, then 'a sense of common purpose' is not enough. But we cannot content ourselves, as Young would, with a mere show of differences, even if only because the so-called neglected minorities can become just as oppressive as the hateful West (Barry 2001). Secondly, promoting difference at any cost, as if cultures were museum pieces, cognitive islands to be left alone, has actually exacerbated some already difficult relations between ethnic groups.

<sup>2</sup> The *White Paper* rightly argues that 'diversity without any overarching common humanity and solidarity would make mutual recognition and social inclusion impossible' (Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs 2008: 14).

It is therefore undeniable the weight of a certain multicultural ideology which is typically 'differentialist' (Ritzer 2010: 245); and it is true that this ideology has contributed to causing serious impasses in managing cultural differences. Yet again, the alternative to differentialism is more complex than a (nevertheless important) call to 'the willingness and capacity to listen to the views of others' (Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs 2008: 17).

It must be remembered, however, that multiculturalism cannot be *tout court* identified with differentialist ideology. This is what Kymlicka states in response to his critics, though the argument whereby multiculturalism is bound to spark disruptive phenomena is not new (Sandel 1997). On the contrary, – writes Kymlicka – 'multiculturalism-as-citizenization is a deeply (and intentionally) transformative project, both for minorities and majorities' (Kymlicka 2010: 39).<sup>3</sup>

This approach does not intend to turn multiculturalism into a fetish to be dogmatically preserved, excluding a priori the possibility to explore alternative solutions to the dilemmas of a plural society. It can therefore be admitted that, seen from this viewpoint, Kymlicka's liberal multiculturalism does not seem that different from the intercultural model, as it shares the latter's political goal of achieving a form of integration based on the respect for differences, within the framework fixed by the human rights revolution.

In conclusion, if we admit that multiculturalism tries, as Alexander would say, to build 'a shared understanding' (Alexander 2003: 114) within civil life, on which alone to build a sense of 'we-ness' (Alexander 2006: 43), it seems that this model, at least in Kymlicka's liberal version, still enjoys good health. But why then rejoice in its death? How is it that everyone, except for Kymlicka and very few others, has failed to understand that multiculturalism is the best hope for building just and inclusive societies around the world?

<sup>3</sup> Some other arguments in defense of multiculturalism are presented, for example, by Parekh (2000) as well as Laden and Owen (2007).

The question, as stated above, is actually more complex than the multiculturalism/interculturalism controversy: Opposition to multiculturalism may emanate from different sources. Three possible scenarios can be sketched.

1) Opposition can firstly be motivated by an oblique (or not so oblique) xenophobia, as noticed by Grillo (2010: 31). Many so-called 'new right' movements, a significant factor in local and national politics across Europe, have charged multiculturalism with a dangerous 'excess of alterity', which aims to counter national cohesion. This paranoid vision is obviously unjustifiable, not to say dangerous, considering that mainstream politicians sometimes echo such populist voices.

2) But there is another possible explanation, linked to the fact that multicultural theory does not exactly match multicultural policy. Assuming this non-coincidence, one can plausibly think that the mentioned backlash is a polemic reaction against the shortcomings of certain so-called 'multiculturalist' agendas: Many migration policies have been based on a highly simplified or occasionally somewhat distorted version of multiculturalism. That being the case, I would here endorse Taylor in saying that the European attack on multiculturalism often seems a classic case of false consciousness, blaming phenomena of the ghettoisation of immigrants, instead of recognising the home-grown failures in promoting integration and combating discrimination (Taylor 2012: 414).

3) Finally, there is a third possible source of criticism, which I consider reasonable. Aside from the difficulties in translating multicultural theory into practice, I believe that the dominant political bias towards the differentialist ideology is not only a caricature. I argue that multicultural theory involves a specific anthropological assumption concerning how human beings are seen. From this point of view, Sen's analysis seems to me correct: Multiculturalism tends to classify individuals and groups by a singular (ethnic, above all) identity. Interestingly, we can detect the same 'solitarist illusion' (Sen 2006: 82) in certain parts of the White Paper: e.g., where interculturalism is defined as an 'exchange of

views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds'. This essentialism, i.e. understanding of cultures and identities as self-consistent entities (or mosaic of entities), may be criticised on the basis of new forms of immigration. Think, for example, about the growth of multilingualism in the UK: Compared to this growing linguistic complexity, the essentialist representation of cultures provides – as Vertovec noticed – 'a misleading, one-dimensional appreciation of contemporary diversity' (Vertovec 2010: 66).

It is then this call to take more sufficient account of the reality of migration that explains, in my opinion, a justifiable opposition to multiculturalism (and also to some version of the interculturalist model). It also explains why even Amselle, who shares with Kymlicka a rejection of earlier models of the unitary, homogeneous nation-state, does not side with the supporters of interculturalism. The proposal he puts forward, 'an originary syncretism or lack of distinctness' (Amselle 1998: 1), is definitely more radical and cannot be interpreted as assimilationism in disguise. It involves an effort to challenge the supposed 'natural' frontiers between the ethnic groups as a political solution against racialisation.

This famous endorsement of 'mestizaje', i.e. 'a kind of Spanish-American conceptualisation of hybridity' (Stockhammer 2012: 16), needs to be discussed. As argued in the next paragraph, an alternative understanding of culture is required. What seems clear, for the moment, is that the 'mestizo logic' – as Canclini accentuates – represents a 'detonating' idea, which 'has altered the manner of speaking about identity, culture, difference, inequality, (and) multiculturalism' (Canclini 2005: 23). In this light, it becomes even more interesting to notice the 'refined, sophisticated, self-critical and moderate multiculturalism' proposed by Modood (2007: 98, 112): 'we have to be flexible' – writes Modood – 'to the form that this takes. Hence, multiculturalism can take a hybridic, multicultural, urban melange form'.

But how can the practice of cultural hybridisation constitute a real alternative to essentialist models of multiculturalism whilst avoiding the

naïve rethoric of certain representations of intercultural dialogue?

## 2. From 'travelling cultures' to 'mestizo democracy'

As a process of encounter and fusion of different cultures, *mestizaje* has always accompanied human history. In spite of all paranoid delusions of purity, the fact of hybridisation demonstrates that persons and cultures are originally and intrinsically mixed. This is a fundamental lesson from cultural anthropology: Despite past complicity with the colonial régimes, it is up to the ethno-anthropological sciences to help deconstruct the so-called 'Myth of the Framework', by discovering that cultures are not self-referential monoliths. This is a myth, according to Bernstein, that compromises dialogue (Bernstein 2010: 390). On the contrary, cultures are never-ending processes of self-understanding and interchange. By right, as Amselle points out, we should not even speak of a culture in itself, because cultural identities arise from a structured field of relations.

So we have to go with the flow, or – as Clifford says – with 'travelling cultures' (Clifford 1997). Of course, as they travel, people and cultures meet and may, in fact, mix. That means that understanding the hybridisation processes is possible on the basis of a new conceptualisation of culture. Outside the travel metaphor, I follow here the narrative account claimed by Seyla Benhabib. Cultures, according to Benhabib (2002: 5), are 'complex human practices of signification and representation, of organization and attribution, which are internally riven by conflicting narratives. Cultures are formed through complex dialogues with other cultures.' What is important to stress in the present definition is that dialogue is a constitutive element of every culture, not an extrinsic duty to act 'interculturally'. Interculturality is then, first of all, a question of life, because daily social life, as clearly phrased by UNESCO (2013: 32), is a 'fabric' of relationships, made of 'lasting cross-cultural personal bonds'. The argument that justifies this narrative definition of culture is simple: We are born into and live in webs of interlocution, then our culture is

generated and structured through ongoing processes of communicative negotiation, both internal and external. That is why cultural identities, as suggested in the image of travelling cultures, are fragile achievements in weaving together different and occasionally conflicting narratives into a unique (and always hybrid) life history. That is why 'cultural humility' (UNESCO 2013: 24) is, in my opinion, a necessary skill to practice and manage the hybridisation processes within democratic frameworks.

Naturally, the travel metaphor may also become ideological: In opposition to the objectification of cultures, one could be invited to wander around the world in a 'rhizomatic' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994) way, taking a bit of everything. Besides, it is well known that Kroeber (1963: 68), one of the founding fathers of cultural anthropology, argued that 'cultures can blend to almost any degree'. As a result, cultural identities are often considered less important than they used to be; what counts is only the possibility of altering the individual, i.e., the possibility of being deeply non-identical and fitting into any situation.

As far as I can see, it is undisputable that cultures are 'miscible'. But things are less obvious than an indiscriminate fusion of differences. This 'tourist hybridism' is based on the perfect continuity between cultures, which seems to me an unverifiable datum. Therefore, I consider more convincing the conclusions drawn by Lévi-Strauss (1977: 331) at his famous seminar on identity: 'Between two cultures, between two living species as close as imaginable, there is always a differential gap and [...] this differential gap cannot be bridged.'

'Differential gap' means that cultures have their specific identity, with different narratives, intersecting and possibly mixing with each other. Consequently, hybridisation requires both the vector of similarity and continuity and the vector of difference and rupture. The first vector is the condition of contact and potential mixing; the second vector is the condition of identity. On this account, it seems reasonable to doubt the simplistic view that cultures are fluxes without breaks in continuity: conceptually, because this 'essentialist anti-essentialism' – in Kompridis'

terms – impedes the realisation that ‘the lack of any identification with our culture renders us indifferent to its fate, indifferent to its future possibilities as much as to its past injustices’ (Kompridis 2005: 340); politically, because it is untrue that anything can so happily mix with anything. Conflict, as stated in the famous Memorandum for the study of acculturation (Redfield, Linton and Herskowitz 1936: 152), can occur as a possible outcome of contact between different narratives. Besides, how can it be claimed that hybridisation is always and always and ever enriching for persons and cultures? The reality is that ‘the borrowings or hybrid forms to which cultural diversity gives rise can take the form of reductive syntheses that are little more than stereotypes’ (UNESCO 2009: 164).

However, an uncritical advocacy of hybridisation tends to overemphasise cultural mixing phenomena as a quasi-magical solution to the problems of negotiating difference in democratic societies. It follows that this debate between supporters and opponents of hybridisation is liable to a fruitless clash:

- (a) differentialism (identity without flux, i.e., closed, fixed identities); and
- (b) indiscriminate hybridism (flux without identity).

I would try to avoid this dead end. From this point of view, it can be interesting to evaluate a political suggestion based on Burke’s Mestizo Democracy (Burke 2002). Surely, there is an exaggerated nonchalance in using the phenomenon of hybridity to qualify a political order. Here it is worth remembering Clifford’s caution, in saying that blending processes are unpredictable, for ‘the politics of hybridity is conjunctural and cannot be deduced from theoretical principles’ (Clifford 1997: 10).

That said, Burke’s proposal seems at least an attempt to avoid both ideological extremes (differentialism/hybridism). His intention is precisely to go ‘beyond Eurocentric castings of multiculturalism’, i.e., differentialism: ‘Rather than rendering cultures in terms of ‘us v. them’ – a politics of possessive identity – a mestizo democracy accents how cultures dynamically interpenetrate and transform each other.’ Now, this transfor-

mative interpenetration is not indiscriminate hybridism because Burke bridles its process within a working logic that – for him – is specific to *métissage*: ‘a hermeneutical unity-in-diversity’. In doing so, he can simultaneously avoid falling back into an assimilationist position, as unity-in-diversity is also a logic ‘beyond the unum-pluribus divide’<sup>4</sup> (Burke 2002: 20, 156, 10).

*Let us now test his model.*

First of all, I need to confirm my original perplexity: There is no guarantee that hybridisation processes evolve as Burke would like, i.e., in compliance with a mutually enriching exchange. In addition, this exchange, which could happen anywhere in varying degrees, is not guaranteed to be beneficial even to democratic cohabitation. The hybridisation process – it is worth repeating – can entail the very type of conflict charged to the differentialist version of multiculturalism.

In Burke’s proposal, however, there is a philosophically crucial point that needs stressing. To explain the mestizo logic of unity-in-diversity, Burke refers to Gadamer (Pantham 1992: 132). The argument, in short, is that ‘unity-in-diversity urges a sense of community through heterogeneity, each culture contributing both to the community and to one another without any one culture necessarily becoming hegemonic’ (Burke 2002: 50).

‘Community through heterogeneity’ is an interesting way to refer to the universal by avoiding two extremes:

- (a) the abstract and hegemonic placement of the universal, which assimilates differences;
- (b) the renunciation of the universal, which eliminates even the political space (Laclau 2000: 305).

According to Burke, we have to think of a common good, if we do not intend to renounce the political project of living together; but we can think of it dynamically, as hybridisation processes suggest:

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<sup>4</sup> ‘One-many divide’. The idea is, in a nutshell, that mestizo democracy guarantees a space in which cultures encounter each other as equals, without privileging one culture over others.

In a unity-in-diversity the substantive common good is not static but, rather, persistently contested and reconfigured through democratic engagement among diverse persons and cultures in public life (Burke 2002: 169).

This conception of a dynamic common good is the 'natural' outcome of a democratic process of dialogue between different groups; or, to be more precise, a dynamic (not hegemonic) common good supposes a political engagement structured through what Benhabib terms 'democratic iterations', that is, 'complex processes of public argument, deliberation, and exchange through which universalist rights, claims and principles are contested and contextualized, invoked and revoked, posited and positioned, throughout legal and political institutions, as well as in the associations of civil society' (Benhabib 2004: 179).

Yet, if we follow this line of reasoning, Burke's proposal needs a further articulation. We agree that, if the intention is to avoid a totalitarian drift, unity needs to be conceived within diversity, that is, as an outcome, temporary and revisable, of cultural interactions. Nevertheless, even diversity can be thought of in a despotic way, typically when a particular is assumed as the totality. This is why diversity also needs to be conceived, in turn, within the horizon of unity. To put it in Burke's terms: Unity is not only contested and reconfigured by diversity contests and refigures; unity is also what enables diversity to be contested and reconfigured, urging it in the direction of the common good.

As a consequence, the political problem is no longer to conjecture a mestizo quality of democracy. It is, rather, a case for examining under which conditions a democracy is able to work on the basis of the double logic of 'unity-in-diversity' and 'diversity-in-unity'.

In more practical terms, we could try to test a political model as follows: Unity-in-diversity could exemplify the logic of civil society, where the common good is common precisely because it is the outcome of (more or less conflictual) interactions between the different social actors involved; whereas diversity-in-unity could inform the logic of the political dimension through

directing the civil movements within democratic institutions. Diversity-in-unity is critical, because it is at this political level, as Carr suggests, that we should try to answer the following question: 'How might the members of disparate groups sustain their independent group identities and still come to regard one another as fellow citizens in a common polity? This is the problem of *e pluri-bus unum*'<sup>5</sup> (Carr 2010: 14).

It is only by ensuring these two conditions that a society can consider including a certain degree of hybridisation. Generally speaking, cultural contact depends on different combinations or a disentanglement of narrative traits. The degree of the composition/decomposition can be measured on a four-level scale, according to John Berry's well-known model (Sam and Berry 2010): 1) integration; 2) assimilation; 3) separation; and 4) marginalisation.

A broad evaluation of these levels is beyond the reach of this paper. But it is clear, as Ang argued, that we have to examine the specific contexts and conditions in which hybridity occurs: A rhetorical call for harmonious amalgamation risks to be 'neglectful of the specific power relations and historical conditions configuring the interactions and encounters which induce forced and unforced processes of hybridisation' (Ang 2001: 197). The degree of hybridisation I have in mind is then ranked at level 1, because only integration, which I interpret according to Modood's account (Modood 2007: 46-51), involves a two-way process of mutual adjustment (and hence unforced combination) between different narratives. That is why the key question, in my opinion, is to consider whether hybridity occurs within the framework of the double logic of 'unity-in-diversity' and 'diversity-in-unity'. This framework, as I try to demonstrate in the following discussion, works on the basis of human rights standards. Accordingly, it should allow us to identify those processes of hybridisation which are consistent with democracy; at the same time, these hybrid identities could

<sup>5</sup> 'Out of many, one'. This is the first motto impressed on the great seal of the United States. It affirms an original plurality and suggests that unity comes out of diversities.

function as detection of masked forms of racial stereotyping.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Civil society as a place of (possible) cultural hybridisations

The reference to civil society is crucial for a political theory intending to pay attention to hybridisation processes. Michel de Certeau was aware of this: At the beginning of the 1980s, he said that the presence of immigrants requires 'to open to them a free space of speech and demonstration in which their own culture can be displayed or offered for the knowledge of others' (Certeau 1997: 134). A free space of speech should be exactly the structure of civil society, where culturally different people meet each other and try to communicate, in order to establish shared conditions for living together. This is why Certeau assumed that civil society could play host to cultural changes and mixing. We can thus argue that civil society works on the basis of unity-in-diversity. In fact, as Carr suggests, assuming pluralism,

unity clearly requires that the groups coming together to constitute a common unit actually share something in common and recognise that they share something in common. At its most basic level, this means that these groups must share a common understanding about why civil association matters, why it is a good idea, and why it deserves their allegiance (Carr 2010: 87).

Besides, a civil society is not 'civil' merely because it displays cultural differences (this is, instead, the ideologic imagination supported by differentialist multiculturalism); the mere fact of flux between travelling cultures is rather a source of instability and potential conflict. Hence, 'the

great end of civil association' – continues Carr – 'is the domestication of the ongoing intergroup conflict arising within the context of the fact of flux' (Carr 2010: 92).

Consequently, a civil society is 'civil' insofar as it is able to promote – within the the fact of flux – what Habermas terms 'the unity of a social life-world through values and norms' (Habermas 1979: 144): not the mere sum of single life-worlds, but the (temporary) shared result of common deliberation, aiming to avoid any form of reification and, positively, to fight for social relationships based on the recognition of our common humanity. At the same time, it must also be taken into account – as Fraser demonstrates – that there cannot be recognition of human value without setting a just redistribution order (Fraser 2003).

It appears that, at a civil society level, fostering the 'capture of speech' processes in view of a shared social understanding can defuse sclerotic interpretations such as 'us' vs. 'them'; then it is possible to move towards a non-particularistic sense of unity through diversity. In fact, the unity of a social life-world invites an understanding of civil society as suggested by Alexander: 'It is the we-ness of a national community, the feeling of connectedness to one another that transcends particular commitments, narrow loyalties, and sectional interests' (Alexander 2006: 43).

It is crucial to emphasise that this 'feeling of connectedness' is not purely emotional; rather, it is the outcome of a reasoning process of deliberation which presupposes what Seligman clearly calls 'the mutual recognition of each individual's innate human dignity' (Seligman 1992: 172). Civility, I believe, has this human-rights-based dimension that requires to be recognised. But this agreement cannot remain at the purely theoretical level: 'Rights and freedoms – as stated by UNESCO (2009: 221) – are not exercised in a vacuum. All rights and freedoms have a cultural dimension that contributes to their effective exercise. It is precisely this dimension that forms the link between the individual, the community and the group, which grounds universal values within a particular society. Civility, I argue, has to be imagined and practiced exactly as this ground-

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<sup>6</sup> As suggested by Servaes and Verschooten (2008: 47), a good example of how hybridisation really works in this sense is the way Islamic law and Western discourses have met in recent years: 'In Afghanistan, women defend their right to education and health care by drawing on Western discourses about human rights. At the same time, however, many of them insist on being faithful to Muslim traditions at home. Elsewhere, many young Islamic women insist on wearing veils because it makes them less vulnerable to reproaches of Westernization and allows them to go out for work or study. They are not necessarily on their way to a complete assimilation of Western ideas.'

ing, where 'the management of cultural diversity can turn a societal challenge into a democratic strength' (UNESCO 2009: 221).

Consequently, solidarity is not a rhetorical call to stir up positive emotions towards others but the awareness of this core value of civility (Shils 1997); in other terms, our humanity depends on the common good of we-ness, based on the respect for a unique, irreplaceable, 'capture of speech'. Because its practical framework remains the diversity between cultures, in order to function as a basis for democratic order this we-ness does not require a full (utopian) consensus on everything. What is needed is rather a fundamental agreement on civility, i.e., on the fact that 'we-ness' is better (morally and politically) than free-riding.

Therefore, this agreement is not an institutional product, an artificial, Hobbes-style, contract supposedly guaranteeing an otherwise impossible civil life; the we-ness is a possible outcome of what Adam Smith terms 'the natural inclination every one has to persuade' (Smith 1982: 352), i.e., our constitutive competence in generating trust and building bonds of communication. The crucial evidence of this fundamental virtue is the multiform phenomenon of associations, more specifically, 'horizontal relations of reciprocity and cooperation' (Putnam 1993: 88) called 'intermediate bodies' (as originally suggested by Montesquieu), on which depends the production of a category of goods that are not consumer goods, but sources of 'social capital' (Edwards 2011).<sup>7</sup>

All this leads us towards the idea that the intermediate bodies of civil society work as a 'pre-political source' – as Habermas argues (Habermas 2008: 105) – that can ensure public forums between people of different cultures and, therefore, a hospitable democracy for possible hybridisations. Obviously, we must avoid the naïvety of believing that civil society is a

self-sufficient source of democracy. As recently demonstrated, 'most civil society actors suffer from severe democratic deficits, including non-existent, poor or unequal participation and weak accountability mechanisms' (Archibugi, Koenig-Archibugi and Marchetti 2012: 227).

That problem is precisely what urges Habermas not to look on civil society 'as a focal point where the lines of societal self-organization as a whole would converge.' Besides, we cannot consider 'civil' any form of societal self-organisation: civil is only the form that passes 'through the filters of the institutionalized procedures of democratic opinion and will-formation and enters through parliamentary debates into legitimate lawmaking' (Habermas 1996: 371).

It becomes clearer that hybridisations cannot be valued as normatively compulsory. Inter-cultural mixing cannot be scheduled or imposed; it is always relative and contingent. Consequently, democracy can be compatible with hybridity only under the historical conditions of civility. Otherwise we should argue the absurd idea that civility work under the abstract category of hybridity; an idea which would be also politically unmanageable, because it would fail to discriminate between the concrete modalities of hybridity. That is why, as already noticed, we have to detect the conditions in which hybridity occurs.

What are, then, the actual circumstances the immigrant finds him/herself in? It is a paradoxical, sometimes dramatic, criss-cross situation: at the intersection between two different (and sometimes conflicting) narratives. The case of French youths of North African descent (also called *Beurs* in French street slang), is illustrative of the difficulty of negotiating creative solutions for hybrid forms of identity and belonging (Berry et al. 2006).

What are then the possible choices? Normally we are inclined to think there is no option beside freezing traditional affiliations and becoming totally alienated. Actually, an alternative exists. Civility, as I have hinted, can accommodate a different choice: that of participating in collaborative practices, based on reciprocal recognition. It is therefore plausible that cooperation, conviviality, solidarity, together with the percep-

<sup>7</sup> Rawls is not far from this relational idea when he defines it as 'social union of social unions', adding that this is 'the idea of the good of such a society' (Rawls 2001: 142). It is worth noting that this notion of society as 'union of unions' is already present in *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls 1999: 462).

tion of sharing overarching values, lead different narratives to bring about the crucial work of 'translation and mediation' (Certeau 1997: 120). This mutual commitment to a common understanding can eventually assume a mestizo form, but certainly moves towards a reshaping of citizenship. I obviously do not think it is possible to eclipse the juridical institution of national citizenship as is the case, for example, in certain forms of extreme cosmopolitanism. The idea that all human beings, regardless of their political affiliation, are (or can and should be) citizens of the world is in conflict with the fact that the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council have adopted several resolutions on statelessness and the arbitrary deprivation of nationality, reaffirming that the right to a nationality is a human right (Kesby 2009); not to mention that the results of the Immigrant Citizens Survey (2012) showed that around three out of four immigrants are or want to become citizens.<sup>8</sup> That being said, I acknowledge that the definition of citizenship as civic laboratory of we-ness provides a context for a moderate cosmopolitan claim. For example, I would endorse Joppke's account of EU citizenship as 'civic citizenship for immigrants, attributed by virtue of residence rather than nationality' (2010: 27). This cosmopolitan definition illustrates what exactly is at stake in cultural mixing within civil society: The experience of hybridisation, as in the case of Beurs, suggests an ethical membership which challenges the static binarism of 'us' and 'them'. 'We have obligations to others,' – writes Appiah – 'obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind' (Appiah 2006: 15).

Are we then bound to an anarchic fusion of differences, an infinite patchwork of identities? There is an unpassable limit, for passing it would mean ruling ourselves out of a 'civil' place, pushed towards the non-place of chaos. This limit, this fundamental measure for social

and political cohabitation, can be termed – by another Habermasian term – 'co-membership' (Habermas 1998: 441).

Habermas uses this word to define the specific relationality of the civil sphere. The idea, in a nutshell, is the following: A democratic state of right cannot exist without its citizens' shared commitment to the primary good of being-together as subjects reciprocally recognising each other. Obviously, Habermas supposes an intersubjective approach, whereby relationality is, anthropologically, the fundamental structure of the human subject. Consequently, this structure is not only a fact discovered through social interaction but also a principle orienting the whole social and political life.

Now, this social capital (which has its political correlate in popular participation) must be institutionally promoted and granted. It is here that the passage to the political sphere takes place, i.e., the necessary filtering of civility through the logic of diversity-in-unity. In fact, co-membership should be promoted if and only if its value, generated and shared at the pluralistic level of civil society, is able to forge a unitary political community of citizens. Actually, only thus can the multiple processes of intercultural translation and mediation within a civil framework be assessed on their real propensity to enrich democratic life. If not, co-membership degenerates into 'fraternity vs. fraternity', showing 'the dark side of social capital' (Putnam 2000: 350, 362).

#### 4. Inventing 'good governance'

It is worth restating that co-membership, conceived as we-ness, or solidarity-fostering civility, is not an institutional artefact. With Rawls, we could say that there is a 'morality of association' (Rawls 1999: 409) to be considered the basis of the political community.

It does not mean, obviously, that we become friends to everyone: 'While every citizen is a friend to some citizens' – writes Rawls –, 'no citizen is a friend to all.' It means, instead, a focus on the political capacity to found a 'common allegiance to justice' providing 'a unified perspective from which they can adjudicate their differences'

<sup>8</sup> The Immigrant Citizens Survey (ICS), piloted by the King Baudouin Foundation and the Migration Policy Group, captured the insights of over 7,000 people in 15 cities in seven countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal and Spain).

(Rawls 1999: 415). Interestingly, this 'allegiance to justice' is founded on the human propensity towards friendship, i.e., a 'morality of association' that every human being learns to exercise from childhood, provided that he lives within a family whose love is identified by its 'caring for his good' (Rawls 1999: 429).

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of this 'natural meaning of fraternity', as Rawls continues: Human beings are actually able to agree with 'the idea of not wanting to have greater advantages unless this is to the benefit of others who are less well off' (Rawls 1999: 90).

Such a 'fraternity', based on cultural diversity, is pivotal to nurturing 'a culture of human rights, which has been one of the international community's main goals for over 60 years' (UNESCO 2009: 242). That is why this fraternity is all the more important because of its irreplaceable dimension, nowadays at great risk of being 'colonised' by a bureaucratic logic or a profit logic. This double logic, Touraine (2011: 397) argues, is the very threat of a pluralistic democracy, because it 'transforms nations and cultures into markets, especially for mass consumption, mass communication and mass media.'

It should by now be clear that the only way to avoid this negative transformation is to foster 'a responsibility of civility on part of the citizenry' (Carr 2010: 97). But it would be a serious mistake to think of civility as self-sufficient: This pre-political source of social unity might change into non-political, or even anti-political, which, would obviously mean anarchy. Then, any possible cultural hybridisations would soon become chaotic as, without a policy (and an economy) in charge of protecting and promoting the sense of co-membership, civil society would fragment in the clash of particularistic interest groups.

Hence, civil society needs what Aristotle termed 'good governance': a political class supporting its more valuable trends (towards a unitary sense of citizenship), and an economy<sup>9</sup> capable of enhancing its potential for respectful coexistence. For this aim, three main standards of democratic legitimacy underpin good

governance: openness, accountability and participation. Openness equates to clarity and transparency in the way in which institutions and political actors operate. Accountability has at its core the obligation to explain and justify conduct. Participation follows the basic principle that 'democracy depends on people being able to take part in public debate.' This means that 'the linear model of dispensing policies from above must be replaced by a virtuous circle, based on feedback, networks and involvement from policy creation to implementation at all levels' (Commission of the European Communities 2001: 11).

Obviously, civil society must itself follow the standards of good governance. From now on, the open question is about an institutional architecture that may channel civility through a participatory process – a question which, nevertheless, cannot be fully addressed here.

One final observation. It seems clear that without a civil life, that is, without the logic of unity-in-diversity as a means of freely cooperating towards a 'shared social understanding', no good governance would exist, only totalitarian or individualistic degenerations; vice-versa, without good governance, that is, without any institutional guarantees to promote certain fundamental goods (civility first and foremost), no democratic life would exist, only anarchy. Now, these pathologies (totalitarianism, anarchy, individualism) lead, sooner or later, to violence. Certainly, no one can eliminate this possibility: Democratic life, in fact, is never a definitive acquisition. On the contrary, democracy is always a prospective task, as Dewey argued.

Consequently, today more than ever before, the task of democracy cannot be subjected to the illusion that it has finally discovered the secret of a transparent dialogue between people from different cultures. This task is, instead, a work in progress, an experiment resembling, in Bauman's words, 'the twisted road to shared humanity' (Bauman 1997: 30).

In the meantime, and without our permission, hybridisations keep occurring, sometimes causing us to stray from that 'twisted road', sometimes just making it more tortuous – but occasionally

<sup>9</sup> The reference is, for instance, to Dasgupta (2000).

making it easier, if just by highlighting the common human dignity we embody in our diverse cultural ways. It is an open challenge, provided we do not cease to move in this direction.

### Conclusion

It may be possible that the major models of management of cultural diversity are in crisis. Multiculturalism, with few exceptions, tends to conceive different cultures as cognitive islands; consequently, it proves itself unable to understand what is really at stake within plural societies. Interculturalism rightly emphasises cultural connections, but it may be sometimes considered naïve in believing that a completely harmonious dialogue can ever come into existence.

Nevertheless, this double crisis does not lead us to the conclusion that social fragmentation is unavoidable. Against the temptation to slide into essentialism, and beyond a naïve view of dialogue as magical shortcut to reciprocal recognition, I have argued that the experience of hybridisations occurring within civil society is highly instructive: It encourages us ‘to invent ways of living together’ (UNESCO 2013: 18). I consider this joint creativity as a key feature of democratic societies, very close to the Socratic idea of ‘mutual search’ among peers for a common understanding (Phaedo 78ab). Creativity makes us partners, because it requires the cultural humility to learn from the other, through a patient innovation of the public sphere.

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### Note on the Author

PAOLO GOMARASCA is a researcher at the Department of Philosophy, Catholic University of the Sacred Heart of Milan (Italy). His research interests include Social and Political Philosophy, Public Ethics, Philosophical Anthropology.

[paolo.gomasca@unicatt.it](mailto:paolo.gomasca@unicatt.it)