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Civil Ideals, Human Rights and Social Change of the East European Post-Socialism

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For the modern East European political thought, Will Kymlicka's theory of multicultural citizenship (1995) and Charles Taylor's theory of recognition (1992) have been pivotal in constituting liberal multiculturalism as the prevailing site for theorizing the diversity of cultures. Liberal multiculturalism has firmly situated »culture« in the context of relations between dominant groups and minority cultures. The effect of this has been significant in locating the discourse of identity/difference in mainstream political theory. Such a conception of »culture« has contributed to constructing and reinstituting cultures as essential objects that are Othered. To develop an alternative to dominant liberal multicultural interpretations of »culture«, as an initial step, it is helpful to turn to critical anthropology of the transformation because that approach emphasizes cultural activity rather than culture-as-object. I explore the implications of making an analytical shift from »culture of civic politics« as bounded object (tradition) to analyzing the »cultural« as contested process, and the extent to which this shift creates opportunities to address intersectional identities and arrangements of power in ways that liberal multiculturalists fail to do. »Cultural« in the context of the post- socialist civic society, I argue, moves analysis beyond Othered cultures to locating the production of cultural identities and cultural relations in contexts of power.

In *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995), Kymlicka presents a theory of minority rights in order to enhance liberal individual freedom and equality, and also to define the limits of minority rights in the context of relations with the liberal state. In Taylor's, »The Politics of Recognition« (1992), he offers a theory of recognition as a sophisticated appeal for the acknowledgment of difference, in which the survival of minority cultures enables us to be authentic, foster equal dignity, and prevent social fragmentation. Whilst Kymlicka appeals to liberal individualists to respond to concerns of culture, Taylor employs liberalcommunitarism to situate the importance of culture.

Kymlicka and Taylor employ culture as a code for speaking of ethnic groups, historical nations and linguistic minorities, all of which tend to be conflated. For Kymlicka culture is a primary good, a resource that provides a context of choice. He states that culture »refers to the distinct customs, perspectives or ethos of a group

of association«, but then stipulates that he will use »culture« to refer to national and ethnic differences in which culture is synonymous with a nation or a people.

For Taylor, culture exists prior to primary goods, in which cultural survival is a vital human need.

Centrally, culture-as-ethnic/national/linguistic-group is used by Kymlicka and Taylor to construct categories of difference. Feminist and post-colonial critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak contests that »culture« in multicultural discourses is »a nice name for the exoticism of the outsiders« (1999: 355). The unspoken premise of both thinkers employs this notion of the outsider so that culture is used only in reference to Others.

The ideological replacement of differentiating Others through »culture« takes place without addressing dominant cultural identities. Cultures that are normalized (i.e. dominant cultures) form the background of both Kymlicka's and Taylor's theories but receive little analytical attention.

Taylor argues that although we have to be wary of imposing a homogenizing standard based on European industrial societies, there are still some cultures that are more advanced than others. The presumption of worth may imagine »a universe in which different cultures complement Bach other with quite different kinds of contribution« but there are nonetheless some cultures that have a »superiority-in-a-certain-respect«.

Furthermore cultures are seen as whole groups that are selfcontained, fixed, bounded and coherent even though internally ethno-cultural, national and linguistic identities are varied and in a constant state of flux. Kymlicka and Taylor are right not to treat cultures as amorphous; however, they underestimate the ways in which members of a culture are constituted through intersectional differences that go beyond culture-as-ethnic/nation/linguistic Otherness.

The use of culture-as-ethnic/nation/linguistic-Other inevitably leads liberal multiculturalists to present culture through an essentialistic definition, in which it becomes an object. An essentialistic definition of culture focuses on the question »what is a culture?« by describing its nature. This use of »culture« treats cultural groups as if they were bounded entities defined through fixed criteria in which members of a culture are homogeneous. This specifically becomes translated into an understanding of culture-as-community, which is quite important for our St. Petersburg discussion using human rights concepts for processing the Otherness in sometimes quite fuzzy situations.

Further, traditional liberal minority politics assumes that societal cultures are stable, unchanging and unified, when in fact cultures vary enormously and are not necessarily cohesive. It is also the case that not all of the people that belong to a particular ethno-cultural minority group will have the same cultural options or possibilities. Even the importance of language to members of a group will vary and be

situational. That approach presupposes that people belong to only one societal culture, when indeed people may move in and out of societal cultures or belong to many societal cultures simultaneously or change societal cultures at some point in their life or only partially participate in cultural practices.

Taylor makes the claim that it is possible to make judgements about the worth of a culture through immersion. This is only possible if a culture is assumed to be unified and homogeneous in such a way as to make judgments about it as a whole entity. Whilst it is possible to make judgments about certain practices that are just, unjust, hierarchical, egalitarian, solidaristic or individualistic, it is problematic to make judgments about the totality of a culture. But Taylor essentializes culture and as such reduces cultures »within a colonial discourse of tradition and modernity, (thus) spatializing these characteristics with a »West and the rest approach«.

The scope of political theory to interrogate »culture« has been overshadowed by the dominance of liberal multicultural interpretations. It is thus necessary to turn to disciplines outside of political science that have historically and normatively situated culture theory as central. Critical political theorists such as Seyla Benhabib (2002) and James Tully (1995) have already begun to look to other subfields. Benhabib employs the notion of culture-as-narrative in which the standpoint of the participant, rather than the observer, is emphasized (2002: 5f.). Tully treats culture as an activity in contested terrains, in which »cultures are not internally homogeneous. They are continuously contested, imagined and reimagined, transformed and negotiated both by their members and through interaction with each other« (1995: 11).

An important strand of liberal thinking argues that the moral capacities and goods pertinent to citizenship have been underplayed as a result of the deontological and procedural biases of liberal philosophy since the 1970s. Two particular accounts of the ethical potential of civil society can be fruitfully distinguished in contemporary theorising. These have generated some of the most influential objections to the presence of identity politics in democratic civil society. While some of these criticisms are more pressing and plausible than others, none is quite as unanswerable as their advocates sometimes assume. The objections considered in this paper stem from two of the main strands liberal theorising of the last two decades – namely democratic associationalism and republican liberalism. The claims and arguments associated with each are not, however, mutually exclusive.

It has been presented by various critical theorists as a space within which there emerges a variety of co-operative ventures, groups and associations. Through the notion of a »civil society«, a conditional unity is accorded to the many different communities and practices associated with a liberal society. The term is also used to convey a sense of the ethical significance of the social space that lies between the domain of private, familial life and the institutions of the state. Some liberal plural-

ists also place instrumental value upon the capacity of civil society to enhance the moral dispositions that a democratic society needs.

Contemporary agents of civil society theorists argue that these kinds of associations are breeding grounds for such values as reasonableness, a disposition to compromise and public spiritedness. These are, in turn, seen as bridges between the background culture and political system of liberal democratic states. On this view civil society is »a social structure which establishes constraints on the pursuit of private interests and provides incentives for individual and collective agents to develop habits of civility«. The idea that there are important moral benefits to be gained from such activities as volunteering, social activism and involvement in the governance of responsible groups, is central to a body of literature devoted to the crisis and renewal of democratic citizenship (Kymlicka/Norman 2000).

Citizenship as Essentially Contestable

To take civil, political and social moments first as analytically distinct and then as historically successive is already to privilege the analytical rationality defining »political/economic man«, and so to disrupt the rhetoric of »stages«.

The first philosophies of public actions imported after 1989–1991 to the region imbued citizenship with a cultural aura and suggested that its civil/capitalist, political/democratic and social/welfare moments were interfused rather than successive. That is, he hinted that his civil, political and social moments entailed forms of rationality other than the strictly analytical. Despite its promise, however, this shift in ordering strategy still left a privileging of »political/economic man.« Thus while that approach increasingly queried the individualised »rights« assumed in the first tripartite model, it also increasingly approached an individually liberal and formally procedural restriction of »citizenship« to the political sphere. »Collective rights«, like those at issue in union activity, remained an »anomaly« (cf. the »classical« Marshall 1950). The problem that the first generation of post-socialist civic activists faced and left uncertain, then, was to how to reconcile inclusion of the cultural and collective effects of citizenship with the individualism in both his analytical privilege and his proposed solution.

Often, a distinction between negative and positive rights is made. Negative rights can further be delineated into rights establishing *freedom from* state or the party interference and *freedom to* do something. Positive rights can include rights to food, housing, paid jobs etc. We here propose to distinguish four groups of human rights, namely (1) *basic human rights*, which include the absence of torture, the absence of political killings, the absence of people who disappear; they thus reflect freedom

from state interference. (2) *Economic rights,* which include primarily private property rights broadly defined. (3) *Civil and political rights*, which include the unrestricted possibility to participate in political life, to travel, not to be censored by the government etc. (4) *Social or emancipatory rights*, which endow the individual with positive rights visá-vis the state.

Negative rights can be interpreted as creating protected domains that not even the state is allowed to trespass. For democratically organized states negative rights can thus also be interpreted as a device to protect minorities against current majorities or as »veto rights«, as they give their holders the right to behave in a certain way, even if a huge majority would like their holders not to act in that way (Blume-Voigt 2004).

From an economic point of view, negative rights can also be interpreted as limiting the scope of possible contracts that are legally enforceable via state institutions. This means that basic human rights cannot only prevent the state from doing certain things, it can also restrict non-state actors in their behaviour. Interpreted like this, basic human rights establish limits to the possible extent of private property rights that actors cannot even voluntarily renounce from.

Hayek (1976) takes up this traditional distinction between negative rights that create domains protected against trespassing and positive rights that endow their holders with a claim against the entire collective.

Following him some activists believed that positive rights are incompatible with a free society, in which individuals determine their own position according to their own goals and means, but negative rights like basic human rights and property rights are welfare enhancing.

The interpretation of basic human rights as limits to the possible extent of private property rights annoys many orthodox economists of transition because it seems to create areas that are exempt from efficiency calculations.

The enforcement of basic human rights can prevent the realization of efficiencies, which means that they can prevent a society from realizing points on the edge of the production possibility frontier. Attributing primordial importance to efficiency considerations can also lead one to point out that well-functioning market economies need not necessarily be democratic. The prerequisites for a well-functioning market economy were secure property rights. Democracies, however, enable majorities to vote in favour of redistribution, which can, at least passed some threshold, be interpreted as an attenuation of property rights. Representatives of this position thus distinguish between economic rights from civil and political rights. However dominant political force tries to avoid declarations like that, from the late 1990ies more and more practical political philosophies in the post-soviet societies follow this line.

Three basic hypotheses with regard to the economic effects of the various kinds of rights can be distinguished: The Hayek hypothesis according to which basic human rights and property rights (negative rights) have a positive impact on welfare and growth, whereas a high degree of social rights (positive rights) would be counter-productive. The Barro-Posner hypothesis argues that there is an important sequence to be observed: first, only property rights are important, they would lead to improvements in income which would later allow societies higher levels in the other kinds of rights. And the Sen (1999) hypothesis purports that freedom, fairness and reciprocity are important and that social capital (which is assumed to encompass elements of all four groups of rights distinguished here) has a positive effect on welfare and growth, which is, however, not necessarily measured in terms of monetary income only (Kimberly-Freeman 2004).

It is argued here (somewhat following the Sen line of argument) that talk of various kinds of human rights makes little sense in the absence of basic human rights. The absence of these abuses in some post-Soviet societies is a crucial pre-condition that must be satisfied before talk of economic rights becomes meaningful. This does not only hold for economic rights but also for political and civil rights. The absence of the repression of basic human rights has also been called a »virtue of omission«.

New wave of activism does not take the basic rule set of a society for granted anymore but try to legitimize or explain it, depending on whether they belong to the normative or the positive branch of movements. One argument for justifying basic human rights could be that individuals who choose a basic legal framework from behind a veil of ignorance are uncertain about their own individual position in the future: they might belong to a minority and might not be willing to succumb to the will of the majority. Viewed like this, human rights can be interpreted as an insurance against adverse effects on one's own utility given that one finds oneself to be with the minority. Agreement to basic human rights can thus be the result of a calculus based on scarcity and opportunity costs.

A slightly different tack on the issue could stress that people might have a preference for being treated with respect and decency even if that has economic costs. Dworkin's (1977) talk of »rights as trumps« is often interpreted as an abdication of economic calculus in favour of a principles-based approach (Blume-Voigt 2004).

Embodying the »civic ideal« early debates about »post socialism«, »citizenship« has served as a key marker of membership in polities that range from empires through nation-states to still uncertainly delineated forms of transnational federalism. The history of debate over its meaning is just as long. »Citizenship« is an essentially contested concept, with its meanings having always emerged in disputed and recursive use. Aristotle set this pattern early in his pragmatic solution to the problem of defining it: »What effectively distinguishes the citizen proper from all

others is his participation in giving judgment and in holding office« (*Politics* 1275a22). Since this simply shifts the issue to what participation means, and since any account of »participation« necessarily implies politico-moral disputes, the fuzziness remains. Marshall left the question just as open when he defined citizenship as »a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community« (1950: 28), for while »membership« may be formally or procedurally specified, »community« has all the vagueness of both its movement-related and scientific usage.

The dependence of »citizenship« on myriad forms of »participatiori« and »community« means that *what* it is must remain uncertain. A trans-situational analysis is still possible, however, through attention to the *how* of disputes over it. Although conceptual *order* may be a mirage, conceptual *ordering is* empirically accessible. Patterns emerge in what analysts include and what they omit as they make situational sense.

The first traditional post-1989/91 model of the evolution of civic, political and social »rights« has been so extensively canvassed that we do not need to repeat its details here. Instead, we move directly to one set of ordering moves in accounts of »citizenship«.

Despite the Aristotelian echo in those definitions, to say »citizenship« in political sociology is to say »modernity«. The classical theorists all at least implicitly treated modernisation through the extension of citizenship, and their themes recur in all the commentaries on and departures from traditional liberalism. These themes arise in the familiar and conflicting axioms on »the state of nature« in theorisations of the order of modernity: that since human life is by nature solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short, social life is possible only if individuality is suppressed in the collectivety represented by the Leviathan.

Those themes, and any number of others, recur in post-socialist accounts of citizenship.

At the same time Adam Ferguson and »civil society« reappear in diagnoses of neo-liberalism. Marx appears in Barbalet's (1988) stress on the tensions between citizenship and capitalism, or in Dalton and Kuechler's (1990) account of social movements as collective actors in struggles for inclusion. Toennies hovers nearby in Wrong's (1994) revisiting of the Hobbesian/Parsonian »problem of order«, and so of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* as modes of belonging. Durkheim resurfaces in Lockwood's (1996) stress on the contradictory dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, or in Alexander's (1997) discussions of citizenship as a civic religion. Weber is front-stage in Turner's (1997) account of citizenship and the city. Blends of those classical themes recur in claims that the shifts in the practice and theorisation of belonging seen in the turn to »multicultural« or »cultural« citizenship mark a transition from the modern to the postmodern.

The liberal »political man« endowed with »rights« who emerged from the state of nature he also invoked the cognate' economic man in all his rationally calculating and utility-maximising glory. This was given to some extent in the context of early papers on citizenship.

Identity Politics

Liberal associationalists reproduce Tocqueville's emphasis upon the voluntary character of group memberships, seeing this as intrinsically morally valuable for a liberal society, and beneficial for the democratic character of the population. For other associationalists, a more stringent standard needs to be met for groups to be »schools of civic virtue«. Identity politics appears to violate both of these conditions, particularly through its propensity to promote the idea that one's membership of certain groups arises from deeply rooted cultural, biological or social processes that are beyond the volition of their individual members. Ethnic associations, religious communities and other groups are more likely to have recourse to arguments about social destiny, ascriptively based injustice, cultural duty and the merits of identity based affinity in characterising the rationale of membership. Involvement with a group on the grounds that one is from a sexual minority group, or because of one's ethnicity, is not in itself a problem for liberals. These groupings are problematic for associationalists in one important further respect. They appear to construct group interests in manner that is incompatible with familiar models of liberal pluralism. In their celebration of the variety of interest-based groups that sustain a democratic society, pluralists presented individual and collective interests as partial, contingent and revisable. Individual participants in such ventures are regarded as the self-conscious bearers of coherent, pre-formed interests. A dual characterisation of association is typical of liberal pluralism. Groups are seen both as potential conduits to democratic character and as vehicles for the promotion of particular interests.

Considered against the backdrop of these conceptions of interest-based association, the groupings practising the politics of identity appear inherently problematic. They are typically regarded as intrinsic to a shared identity that is, in turn, seen as affecting the experiences and well being of group members.

While associationalists remain enchanted by Tocqueville's notion of groups as breeding-grounds for the democratic spirit, some contemporary liberals worry about the apparent idealisation of group life promoted by the revival of Tocquevillian ideas. The idea of considering groups as (potential) »schools of democracy« is a troubling claim for several different reasons.

Though they disagree on many things, liberal advocates of civil society tend to share the conviction that civil society is morally separable from, and counter-opposed to, the norms governing the spheres in which the state and market are constituted as sovereign powers. This perspective sees in the arenas of civil society the sources of the virtuous disposition and civic consciousness that are vital for the sustenance of a liberal democratic polity. Not all liberal theorists of the modern democratic state, however, see the relationship between civil society and civic virtue in this way. As Charles Taylor notes in his grand overview of the traditions of western civil society theorising, the notion of state and society as organically counter-opposed has been continually checked by the idea that the constitution of a democratic society re-quires the prior achievement of a free state. Republican theorists, in particular, have argued for the priority of the constitutional and legal guarantee of freedom from arbitrary influence as preconditions for the exercise of individual liberties in the context of a civil society. While some forms of republican thought see sub-national group commitments and loyalties as intrinsic obstacles to the development of a civic consciousness, various theorists have sought to incorporate some of the moral and deliberative emphases of the republican tradition within a reformulated liberalism. That signals commitments to the principle of individual freedom and conviction that a variety of moral beliefs are an ineradicable feature of a free society, in contrast to more stringent civic republican ideas about citizenship.

For these sorts of liberal, identity politics is a worrying threat to democracy both because it disrupts the role of civil society as a conduit to democratic virtue, and because it hampers the kinds of deliberative practice that the public sphere of a democracy requires. Identity based communities, it is suggested, are, overly encom-passing, in both moral and psychological terms. They make excessive demands upon the loyalties and moral energies of their members, and deplete the motivations that they need to learn to be citizens. Above all, they undermine the socialisation of citizens into dispositions appropriate to democratic deliberation. Such groups tend to teach their participants to engage their fellow citizens primarily from the stand-point of membership of an aggrieved sub-group, rather than as co-equals engaged in the kinds of deliberation necessary to develop a sense of the general good of the community.

The discussion so far in this paper has indicated that human rights norms have a growing impact on post-socialist politics, particularly towards new social move-ments. This is largely explicable in *instrumental* terms – these groups are told to comply; conditionality is applied. Compliance is achieved through pressure, incen-tives or coercive impact. But it is also apparent from the discussion that norms matter for *non-instrumental* reasons. This is much more difficult to explain because we must then assume that norms are complied with for other reasons, such as rightness, justice or identity. Motivations for political action may thus be rooted in a

conviction that something is just and right, and that it should be supported because it is »Enlighted« and conforms to modern values and identity. When does an identity become politically relevant as a preference or an interest, which in turn leads to political action?

Sjursen (2002) suggests there are three types of explanation for political action – instrumental, rights-based and value-based, with the latter referring to the specific normative context of a political actor. It has been argued that human rights are complied with for three reasons or combinations of reasons. They are the same ones that apply domestically when we obey the law: coercion, »shaming« or persuasion. Abbott et al. (1999: 13) propose, that »a key consequence of legalisation for international cooperation lies in its effects on compliance with international obligations«. Compliance is analysed along three dimensions: *delegation, legalization* and *precision.* These variables are also useful for formulating hypotheses about the role of human rights in the new Post-Soviet politics.

In comparing public opinion in the New and old Europe then, we see a curious set of contrasts. In the post-Soviet societies, many intellectuals and politicians are deeply pessimistic about the prospect that sub state national groups can exercise territorial autonomy in accordance with liberal-democratic norms, yet are surprisingly optimistic about the possibility that sub state nationalism will simply disappear. By contrast, the traditional West-European public opinion is optimistic about the capacity of sub state national groups to govern within liberal-democratic constraints, but pessimistic about the likelihood that sub state nationalism will disappear as a result of processes of modernization, democratization, development or globalization.

But there is one other very important factor. The trend towards greater accommodation of diversity can be blocked or deflected by considerations of security. States will not accord greater powers or resources to groups that are perceived as disloyal, and therefore a threat to the security of the state.

Throughout most of the post-socialist and post-Soviet State-minority relations have been »securitized«. In the West, by contrast, ethnic politics have been almost entirely »desecuritized«. The politics of sub state nationalism in the West is just that – normal day-to-day politics. Relations between the state and national minorities have been taken out of the »security« box, and put in the »democratic politics« box.

Minorities and New Identities Between Human Rights and Social Change

The »securitization« of state-minority relations in Eastern Europe is very real and certainly stands in the way of transferring issues such as autonomy from the »security« to the »democratic politics« box, along the lines of what has mostly occurred in the West. When we put this aspect into perspective, on the one hand, the surface manifestation of reluctance by most of the new political class to go down the autonomy route for their national minorities largely echoes the underlying suspicion of, if not hostility to, cultural diversity imported at the time of collapse of the Socialist Ancient Regime from the nominally »culture-blind« values of former and new masters, consolidating the stress on national unity (and sovereignty) prompted by concerns for internal and international stability. On the other hand, by invoking security as a justification for such reluctance, indirectly reaffirms the territorial integrity of states as the most veritable mantra of inter-state relations.

In arguing for autonomy and official language rights in Eastern Europe, movements address some of the key concerns which have been voiced in this context, namely that 1) community leaders may in fact consist of unaccountable people who purportedly mischaracterize the aspirations of the group; 2) minority territorial autonomy regimes may reflect a »special status« running counter to equality of treatment, and may even prove oppressive *vis-á-vis* non-minority groups within the relevant area; and, even more importantly: 3) they may constitute a threat to the cohesion and stability of the country.

The crisis of identity that we are at present witnessing is not solely coloured by the motifs of disenchantment. It also defines the space of emergence for the upsurge in identities being renewed by the current predicaments of the human condition. Decentralization suffered by complex societies through the absence of a central instance of regulation and self-expression, in which »collective identities are subject to oscillations in the flux of interpretations, taking on more the image of a fragile network than that of a stable centre of self-reflection«. A new type of structural change is fragmenting the cultural landscapes of class, gender, ethnicity, race, and nationality, which had in the past provided us with solid locales as social individuals.

The celebration of weak identities is closely related to the celebration of market de-regulation demanded by the neo liberal ideology, which presently steers the course of globalization. David Harvey (1989) has relevantly noted the paradox that »as spatial barriers become less decisive, the sensitivity of capital towards differences in pace grows all the more, increasing the incentive for places to make themselves distinct in order to attract capital.« Local identity is thus compelled to transform

itself into a marketable representation of difference: it becomes subject to make-overs, which reinforce its exoticism, and to hybridizations, which neutralize its most conflicting features.

It is to the feminist movement that we owe the production of a radically new perspective on identity which, countering all forms of essentialism, affirms the divided, decentred nature of the subject while at the same time refusing to accept an infinitely fluid and malleable conception of identity (Mouffe 1996). This permits us not only to inscribe the »politics of identity« within the political project of human emancipation, but also to rethink the very meaning of politics, postulating »the creation of a new type of political subject«. This last sentiment recovers for the process of identity construction not only those power struggles produced in the materiality of social relations, but also those located within the realm of the imaginary. As with the multiplicity of rival identities, the affirmation of a decentred, split subject appears not as a theoretical postulate but as the result of an exploration of the concrete experience of oppression.

The last point of our debate centres on the highly problematical relationship which today exists between particularism and universalism. The present diversification of cultural identities – with no little prompting from postmodernist discourse – drives towards the radical exaltation of difference. But, wonders Ernesto Laclau (1996: 46), Is particularism conceivable solely as such, leaving aside the differences that it affirms? Are the relations between universalism and particularism mutually exclusive?

What multiculturalism demonstrates is that liberal-democratic institutions have remained too narrow to welcome a cultural diversity that is tearing apart our societies for the very reason that it cannot be contained within that institutional structure. This tearing apart can only be stitched together by a politics that extends universal rights and values to all those sectors of the population, which have previously lived outside the application of those rights.

It is at this point that the identity debate achieves its maximum tension. In an article bordering on a manifesto, Eric Hobsbawm (1996) wonders what identity politics has to do with the emancipatory project. Identities today appear more a matter of fashion than the colour of your skin. They are interchangeable, chameleon-like, and mix-and-match. By contrast, the classic Left was mobilized by »grand and universal« causes. Identity politics are, for Hobsbawm, a problem for minorities, and the alliances forged among minorities who cluster around negatively defined identities will always be in danger of disintegrating in the face of the slightest internal conflict. From a left-feminist perspective, Chantal Mouffe (1996) identifies today's project of emancipation with a deepening of democracy, the key to which is to be found in multiculturalism. It is not only cultural but also political questions that are at play in the diversity and conflict of identities: these are today the site and

object of political struggles, and, moreover, they shape the primordial terrain in which hegemony is exercised.

As a conclusion an illuminating question is emerging: »What type of relationship can be established between identity and otherness that might defuse the danger of exclusion?« As a demarcation between an »us« and a »them«, every identity implies the temptation to turn the other into an enemy who threatens my own (personal and group) identity. Therefore, in order to respond to the question formulated, it is necessary to distinguish *the political* – the dimension of hostility and antagonism between human beings – from *politics:* the construction of an order that organizes and facilitates.