Recognition, Multiculturalism and the Allure of Separatism

Volker M. Heins

In Charles Taylor's seminal writings, the revival of the nineteenth-century concept of 'recognition' was closely connected to the birth of 'multiculturalism' as a public policy and normative idea. This connection has unfortunately been dissolved by continental political philosophers such as Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth who reject all group-based understandings of recognition which cannot be reduced to aspirations for individual freedom within a given state or society. Yet this individualist bias has proven to be rather unproductive in the field of international political theory. I therefore suggest returning to and clarifying the original conceptual connection between recognition and multiculturalism as a way of rethinking the relations between cultural groups, nations and states from a normative point of view. The first generation of multiculturalists has dealt primarily with the subject of just and sustainable intergroup and international relationships – between dominant national majorities, restive national minorities, immigrant and Aboriginal communities within legal nation-states. Multiculturalism was conceived as a halfway house between assimilation and separatism, and as a remedy against both. The explicit goal for Taylor, in particular, was to introduce multicultural 'recognition' as an antidote not only to the injuries of forced assimilation, but also to the 'impending breakup' (Taylor 1994: 52) of a highly diverse country such as Canada. My argument in this paper is about the question whether Taylor's idea can be elaborated with respect to the world community of states and societies.

I proceed in several steps. Firstly, I wish to highlight the link between recognition and the international by reconstructing Taylor's concept of multiculturalism as an antidote against ethnic separatism. Secondly, I argue that Taylor's continental critics such as Habermas burned the bridge connecting

recognition and the international by confining struggles for recognition to the domestic sphere of firmly established nation-states. Thirdly, I argue against Honneth's overly harmonious and teleological approach, and in favour of a more agonistic reading of the concept of recognition. More specifically, I contend that his theory does not improve our understanding of situations where groups crystallize around strong imaginations of national, ethnic or religious integrity. Such potentially separatist groups straddling the boundaries of the national and the international are not interested in reciprocal esteem, do not seek recognition (in the full sense of the term) from their opponents and cannot reasonably be expected to do so. After illustrating this thought with two vignettes on the politics of Malcolm X and the early James Joyce, I conclude with a comment on the anti-separatist element in the politics of recognition and its international implications.

Beyond the domestic–international divide: Taylor

To avoid misunderstandings, I should begin by clarifying the meaning of the term 'recognition' as it is used by moral and political philosophers who draw more or less systematically on Hegel (e.g. Honneth 1995; Ikäheimo 2014; Ricoeur 2005; Taylor 1994). The concept offers the possibility of thinking about society in radically relational terms and in grasping why and how people respond to attitudes of rejection or disrespect. Recognition is thus not concerned with the acceptance of institutions or principles as legitimate or valid, but only with relations between persons and groups who are both recognized and recognizers. Only persons and groups can 'struggle' for and suffer from a lack of recognition. This is the point of departure in Taylor's essay 'The Politics of Recognition', which was first given as a lecture inaugurating the founding of Princeton University's Center for Human Values in 1990. Taylor focuses on the moral consequences of the denial of recognition for persons and groups. These consequences are described not simply as embarrassing or annoying, but as blatantly unjust. Recognition is 'a vital human need' (Taylor 1994: 26) because it is closely intertwined with questions of identity and our sense of place in the world. If our understanding of who we are doesn't resonate with the wider society, whose members refuse to recognize us, we are likely to suffer from a lack of self-confidence and a sense of powerlessness.

Certain forms of non-recognition or misrecognition are unavoidable in modern capitalist societies, for example the experience of lovers whose love

is not reciprocated or of workers whose specific skills have been devalued by rapid technological change. Taylor, however, is interested only in those forms of deliberate misrecognition which can be countered through social struggles and politics. Recognition comes in two variants: 'difference-blind', universal respect based on equal rights and particularistic 'esteem' for what makes someone's qualities or achievements special (1994: 40, 48–9). Referring to the example of 'women in patriarchal societies', Taylor describes the *mechanism* of misrecognition as follows: those women 'have been induced to adopt a depreciatory image of themselves. They have internalized a picture of their inferiority, so that even when some of the objective obstacles to their advancement fall away, they may be incapable of taking advantage of the new opportunities' (1994: 25). For advocates of liberation, this is deeply troubling because the lack of self-respect produced by systematic misrecognition can be so profound that victims of disrespect are unable to muster the energy to transform their 'need' for recognition into an effective 'demand' (1994: 25). Thus, structures and practices of misrecognition have paradoxical consequences insofar as they impel disrespected persons and groups to push for the realization of standards of dignity while undermining the strength and self-respect needed to engage in struggles for recognition.

Two more points can be teased out from the above quotation. Firstly, the Canadian philosopher implicitly acknowledges that even if 'vertical' recognition between persons and groups on the one hand and social institutions or political authorities on the other hand has been established, the 'horizontal' misrecognition between persons or groups may still persist, because low self-esteem inhibits victims of injustice from contributing their part to the transformation of social relations.¹ The problem of vertical and horizontal dimensions of recognition is connected to the problem of rights and esteem as two different forms of recognition. Whereas rights can be established through political will and legal reform, esteem cannot be demanded but depends on the unforced evolution of social manners and mores. Without downplaying the significance of equal respect and legal equality, Taylor emphasizes the role of particularistic esteem as an autonomous source of freedom and well-being.

What I find more striking though, and more relevant in the present context, is Taylor's intellectual indebtedness to the anti-colonial writer Frantz Fanon, who was the first to make the point that people can be ruled by imposing on them 'a picture of their inferiority': 'Every colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The

colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards' (Fanon 2008: 9; see Taylor 1994: 65–6).

Taking this cue from Fanon, Taylor returns to the original meaning and critique of assimilation – a concept that was introduced in colonial contexts before it has been used in debates about the incorporation of immigrants in Western nation-states. In fact, the concept first appeared in the vocabulary of the British Empire after the loss of the American colonies, when officers in London decided to tighten the reins on their subjects in the rest of the empire. It is also worth recalling that the defeat of the British in the American War and the Declaration of Independence of their former colonies sparked another, much better known conceptual innovation when Jeremy Bentham first introduced the new word 'international' in the vocabulary of legal and political thought (Armitage 2013: 179). Interestingly, the initial testing ground for disciplinary techniques of 'assimilation' in what then looked like an increasingly 'international' world was the French-speaking province of Quebec in Canada, where a hopeless attempt was made to turn rural Catholic immigrants from the Normandy and Brittany regions of France into Englishmen. Taylor can be read as drawing radical consequences from insights that already occurred to eighteenth-century British administrators who realized that they had to make concessions to the 'enduring ethos of the French Canadians as expressed in language, religion and social usage' (Harlow 1964: 713; Price 1969: 181–2).

Taylor shares Fanon's instinctive appreciation of the potential value of territorially bounded cultural identities without accepting his view that the struggle for cultural recognition is necessarily a struggle for independent statehood. The happy medium between a 'difference-blind' society and the separation of oppressed or disadvantaged minorities is rather what Taylor calls 'multiculturalism'. Faithful to his own imperative that we must always start with the 'presumption' (Taylor 1994: 66–8) of equal worth of all cultures, Taylor attempts to combine and reconcile Anglo-Canadian and Quebecois perspectives. Much of his classic essay is devoted to the defence of Quebec as a 'distinct society' with its own collective goals. At the same time, his reasoning is driven by his fear of the 'impending breakup of the country' (1994: 52) at the hands of angry separatists in Quebec who for a long time used to describe themselves, in Fanonian terms, as the 'white niggers of America' (Vallièrès 1971). Taylor's moderate and reconciliatory defence of Quebec nationalism is backed up by a principled argument about different ways of interpreting liberalism and the politics of equal respect. But there is also a strong element of contextual and pragmatic reasoning based on the search for second-best solutions for a *given*

pluralistic society that cannot be redesigned at will (Levy 2007). Other societies may simply be under less pressure to search for new ways of multicultural accommodation because they are more homogeneous. The general trend of our time, however, is that the domestic sphere of most societies increasingly looks like a mirror image of the international sphere as more and more national societies become multicultural. For this reason, the conventional model of difference-blind liberalism is not only unjust but also '*impractical* in tomorrow's world' (Taylor 1994: 61; emphasis added).

Re-establishing the domestic–international divide: Habermas

At least in the beginning, Taylor's multiculturalism was not so much about the incorporation of immigrants, but rather about assuaging the separatist passions of the French-speaking national minority of Quebecers within the Canadian federation. Separatism, if legitimate, is the response of people who have already been separated from mainstream society. At the same time, Taylor is critical of separatist movements and maintains that they can and should be countered by policies of recognition and the abolition of unitary states based on the fiction of undivided popular sovereignty. But neither the empirical circumstances nor the potentially innovative conceptual consequences of Taylor's particular focus on a national minority threatening secession were fully grasped by his commentators. This is true although the issue of Quebec figured prominently in the debate stimulated by Taylor. Habermas, in particular, criticizes Taylor for justifying the special status of Quebec and the right of its government to enact laws deemed necessary for cultural survival, for example by not allowing francophones and immigrants to send their children to English-language public schools. In his article 'Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State', he argues that Taylor 'calls into question the individualistic core of the modern conception of freedom' (Habermas 2002: 205) by pitting the protection of individual rights against safeguarding collective ways of life, and by giving precedence to the latter in certain cases of conflict.

Nevertheless, Habermas accepts Taylor's initial diagnosis that entire groups of citizens can grow alienated even from a democratic state, because the diverse and fluctuating composition of the population may not be reflected in social policies, school curricula, public holidays and the general spirit of institutions. This in turn can lead to 'cultural battles in which disrespected minorities struggle against an insensitive majority culture' (2002: 218). However, Habermas

does not contemplate the possibility that at least some groups engaged in struggles for recognition might opt for 'exit' instead of 'voice' by developing a separatist mentality, either literally by reclaiming their ancestral homeland, or metaphorically by withdrawing into a parallel moral universe. Nor does he believe in the wisdom of granting of group rights as a way of recognizing and including historically disadvantaged minorities. By arguing against group rights, which are rejected as being 'not only unnecessary but questionable from a normative point of view' (2002: 222), Habermas passes up the chance of constructing a confederal and multicultural middle ground between the sacred domestic space of well-ordered democratic societies and the profane world of international anarchy. His argument is twofold. Firstly, whereas Taylor develops the idea of a liberalism for any 'cultural community that *wants* to survive' (Taylor 1994: 61; emphasis added), Habermas misreads group rights as legal instruments akin to measures of biological species protection. His highly influential critique culminates in the charge that multiculturalism amounts to an attempt to 'guarantee' the survival of cultural groups by administrative means, even against the will of their members.

Secondly, Habermas reduces the range of candidates for cultural recognition by introducing 'modernization' as a faceless force of homogenization. His rhetorical analogy between group rights and the preservation of endangered biological species attests to the evolutionist spirit of his political theory which tends to represent unwelcome forms of life as doomed to disappear anyway. In Habermas's view, struggles for recognition between cultural groups take place against the intimidating backdrop of the maelstrom of modernity. Many traditional and rural 'subcultures and lifeworlds', he reminds his readers, have vanished without a trace. 'Those forms of life were caught up and crushed in the process of modernization', and he makes it clear that this is no cause for sadness (Habermas 2002: 222). The dice of history are biased against all 'stationary' and 'rigid forms of life' – a lesson Habermas explicitly applies to ethnic 'immigrant cultures' (2002: 223) in contemporary societies.

My conclusion is that Habermas has shifted the terms of the debate on recognition and the international in important ways. For one, he deconstructs the connection between recognition and the multiculturalism by not leaving much cultural difference to recognize. His unenquiring confidence in the homogenizing as well as ultimately benign forces of modernization, which destroy earlier, traditional or 'ethnic' ways of life, makes the problem of recognition much less urgent. On this account, there is no justification, but also no need for 'imposing a false homogeneity' (Taylor 1994: 44) on increasingly diverse populations, (a) because much of the job of assimilation is done anonymously through

modernization and (b) because the resulting greater cultural homogeneity cannot be false, since the survival of forms of life is synonymous with their vibrancy and ethical attractiveness. Obviously, Habermas fails to consider forms of life that might have been attractive to those living them, but were nevertheless crushed.

Moreover, he separates what is connected in Taylor's thinking by treating struggles for recognition as an internal affair of democratic states that can be resolved without any significant moral or legal innovations. Habermas also trivializes Taylor's contribution by glossing over his highly original fusion of western and postcolonial perspectives, epitomized by his references to Rousseau and Montesquieu as well as to Fanon. As I understand it, Taylor's multiculturalism starts from the insight that the 'international' gradually eats into the domestic sphere of modern constitutional states, often nurturing 'metaphorical nations' (Bhabha 1990) of natives, migrants and minorities, some of which might one day develop less metaphorically separatist ambitions. Taylor and other multiculturalists are intrigued by this potential of internationality, or even international anarchy, within the legal nation-state, which in recent times has often been reinforced by foreign voices getting involved in domestic quarrels over issues such as allegedly blasphemous artworks, the building of mosques or the regulation of male ritual circumcision. Habermas adopts the opposite perspective: discussing the international sphere in light of the domestic analogy, he expresses the hope that international relations between states can be domesticated and subject to the same forms of institutional and juridical control that regulate social relations within states. His writings on the European Union, for example, are inspired by the twin ideals of an ever-expanding transnational domestic sphere under a comprehensive legal 'harmonization' regime, and of an entire continent speaking to the world with 'one voice' (Habermas 2012: 3, 118). From this point of view, the international is itself a passing phenomenon slowly succumbing to the domestication of world society.

The trouble with recognition

Honneth completes the dual disjuncture between recognition and multiculturalism, and between recognition and the international. First of all, he has rid the theory of recognition of the multiculturalist implications emphasized by Taylor. Moreover, and perhaps more surprisingly, he tends to describe relations of recognition as an internal affair of firmly established states or societies. I now turn to discuss these two theoretical moves in more detail.

Whereas friendly critics such as David Owen (2007) have tried to re-inject multiculturalism into recognition theory, Honneth has so far seen little reason to elaborate on his few dismissive remarks about multiculturalism as a basically redundant policy that adds nothing to the struggle for equal rights (Honneth 2003: 169–70). I would like to reinforce Owen's point that any political theory of recognition needs to say something substantial about the status of disadvantaged cultural minorities in liberal societies, and why certain modes of incorporation of outsiders are to be preferred to others. For Honneth, critical theory is not about *handing down* indisputable normative principles to be applied to whatever circumstances may present themselves; the goal is rather to *draw out* principles of justice from real-world social struggles. Arguing against the abstraction and distance of political philosophy from the lived experience of most people in the world, he wants to narrow the gap between the theorist and other citizens. Recognition theory is a political philosophy with people in it.

Given these aspirations, it is astonishing that Honneth's theory has no place for the specific struggles of cultural minorities, some of which go beyond demanding equal rights. Honneth acknowledges that individuals often feel the need to belong to particularistic cultural groups and that they sometimes struggle to obtain recognition for their difference. However, he argues that the sheer fact of belonging to a group cannot be reason enough to demand any kind of special appreciation from those who do not belong to the same group. My right to be different is simply my right to be treated equally and not to be discriminated against because of my belonging to particular groups.

However, these general propositions are unhelpful in deciding what to make of recent controversies over issues such as the wearing of headscarves and veils, kosher and halal slaughter or male ritual circumcision. In these ongoing controversies, spokespersons of religious or ethnic minorities argue not simply for equal treatment, but for exemptions from dress codes in public institutions, exemptions from animal protection laws or culturally sensitive notions of children's welfare. Yet, from the point of view of recognition theory, such claims are legitimate only if they can be translated into calls for legal 'equality' or for more esteem based on the specific 'achievements' of the respective groups (2003: 138–50). His argument that most cultural struggles of minorities are, in fact, about legal equality is only partly convincing, as the example of the blanket prohibition of Islamic headscarves in French or Turkish public schools shows, which – for instance according to a 2004 ruling by European Court of Human Rights in the landmark case of *Leyla Şahin v. Turkey* – is not in itself

discriminatory. If cultural struggles are instead waged not for equality, but for esteem, then they are self-defeating, as Honneth correctly states (2003: 168; see Taylor 1994: 70). Demanding esteem for the particular manners and mores of a religious or cultural minority doesn't make sense, because one can decide to ignore or tolerate something, but not to like it. Esteem cannot be willed but needs to be cultivated in continuous interactions. This argument also casts a dubious light on the slogan of a 'struggle' for recognition. Struggling for recognition as esteem can only mean that members of society vie for acknowledgement and sympathy by advertising their contributions to the welfare of others. This is very different from struggles for equal rights, which usually have to overcome opponents by force.

My impression is that, despite the orientation of his theory to the experiences of real people, Honneth tries to shoehorn those experiences into prefabricated categories. Many multicultural struggles are not about legal equality or even about legal issues at all (Amir-Moazami 2014). And they are not about gaining the esteem of others but about living an authentic life, for example a life modelled on the prophet Daniel who declined to eat non-kosher food in Babylon and rejected assimilation to its cultural system. Against the intentions of a reconstructive critique of contemporary society based on the moral claims real actors make, Honneth narrows the scope of recognition theory to those struggles that fit his idealized principles of legal equality and merit.

Honneth's dismissal of the politics of cultural difference has consequences for his international thought. By taking the existence of firmly established states for granted, he underestimates how some multicultural struggles call into question the very identity and even the boundaries of the political community in which they take place. Struggles for recognition are conceptualized as struggles for inclusion, not as more radical struggles about the kind of community into which people want to be included. Consider the following quotes: legal rights including welfare rights allow citizens to develop a sense of "full-fledged" membership in a political community' (Honneth 1995: 116); individuals desire to have their achievements valued 'within their community' (1995: 134); struggles for recognition take place 'within a society's inherited cultural horizon' (1995: 134); the question to be answered is how 'moral progress can be evaluated within such [liberal-capitalist] societies' (Honneth 2003: 185). On all these occasions, Honneth consistently takes the identity and boundaries of 'political communities' or 'societies' as given. This implies a restriction of the purview of the theory which has something to say about social movements beyond national borders, but remains silent on international

conflicts between states, struggles for independent statehood and struggles for collective autonomy within states.

The domestic bias is reinforced by a weak concept of struggle. In a discussion with Luc Boltanski, Honneth has emphasized that his use of the term 'struggle' differs from Marxist or Weberian versions in that it tries to combine 'the conflictual and the peaceful' (Boltanski and Honneth 2009: 89). Struggles for recognition are struggles by disrespected and marginalized groups for inclusion into the larger moral and political community of which they are a part. In the words of the sociologist Andreas Pettenkofer, Honneth writes 'conflict theory' as 'consensus theory' (Pettenkofer 2010: 166; see also Schaap 2005). This tendency becomes even more obvious in his most recent work, where the modern ideals of legal equality, solidarity and love are said to be 'generally accepted' and 'already institutionalized' (Honneth 2014: 10, 63). Future struggles are left with the residual task of fully realizing those uncontroversial ideals.

Two examples: Malcolm X and James Joyce

But is it plausible to assume that oppressed groups always confine themselves to applying universally accepted moral or legal principles to their situation? The contested nature of the very standards and dimensions of mutual recognition can be demonstrated by exploring the case of the civil rights and black liberation movement in the United States after the Second World War. The two figures of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X epitomize two different strategies of connecting experiences of disenfranchisement, feelings of shame, and collective protest and self-organization for change. Whereas King appealed to Christian values and to the American Constitution, Malcolm X fell for the allure of separatism. He did not conceive and organize the resistance of African Americans, whom he did not even view as 'Americans', within the horizon of a common culture shared by all citizens of the United States. The idea was instead to create a new, ultimately separatist African and Muslim identity out of the revived collective memory of slavery and oppression. Black Muslims likened law enforcement authorities in the urban ghettos to occupying powers, and their own struggle to postcolonial movements in Africa. Addressing a crowd in November 1963, Malcolm insisted, 'A revolutionary wants land so he can set up his own nation, an independent nation' (cited in Marable 2011: 264). Despite his deplorable anti-Semitic leanings, Malcolm's concept of emancipation was modelled on the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt (Rogers 2009).

Together with the ambition to create a parallel culture with distinctly 'black' ways of dressing, speaking, making music, worshipping and child rearing, the public representation of a proud new black identity was itself considered a political action. Self-respect was sought not as a consequence of white America finally changing its mind and recognizing black women and men as equal fellow-citizens, but through spiritual self-reliance and a kind of self-sustaining bootstrapping operation. The idea of developing an autonomous group ethos was meant to counter the dispiriting legacies of slavery and thereby shorten the path to liberation by de-emphasizing the importance of what the 'white devils' were thinking or doing. To be respected by 'the white man' was still a goal of the movement, but Malcolm urged his followers to 'demand his respect' in the way strong personalities command respect and awe without ever expecting 'love' (cited in Marable 2011: 186).

This example points to a systematic problem in recognition theory. It shows that the answer to the question of who the 'significant others' are (Taylor 1994: 36–7) from whom recognition is sought depends on the cognitive map guiding the action of persons and groups in everyday life as well as in political and social struggles. Our moral expectations change depending on what sort of recognition we are seeking. Only respect for equal rights is expected from everyone. But to be properly appreciated, esteem for our achievements has to come from particular sources. And we definitely do not want to be loved by everyone. For the black Muslims in the United States the significant others were not their own fellow-citizens, but Muslims in other parts of the world. Like some of his comrades, Malcolm travelled extensively in the Middle East and Africa, and even joined the pilgrimage to Mecca, not only to garner sympathy for an imagined common cause, but also to deepen his particular transnational Shi'a Muslim identity. As Manning Marable writes in his critical biography, many black Americans, after converting to Islam, did not care at all about being recognized by non-black Americans, but tried hard and 'had much to gain from recognition or even acknowledgment by major Muslim states' (Marable 2011: 165) and other, non-state authorities.²

The important lesson here is that a neo-Hegelian, teleological conception of recognition tends to restrict our view of the full range of possibilities for disrespected and marginalized groups willing to change their situation. In particular, such groups do not necessarily struggle for inclusion into the same pre-existing community from which they were first excluded and which was the very source of their humiliation. They might as well struggle for inclusion into an altogether different community *yet to be created*. Critics of

the standard version of recognition theory such as Cillian McBride (2013) have argued that victims of disrespect do not usually seek recognition from *everybody*, and that they struggle not just for recognition but also over the question of which particular individuals, groups or institutions are worthy sources of recognition. Consider James Baldwin's classic *The Fire Next Time*: 'I do not know many Negroes who are eager to be "accepted" by white people, still less to be loved by them' (Baldwin 1992: 21). Freeing oneself from the very need for recognition from particular quarters is an essential part of liberation.

Another great writer on the subject of oppressed nations or minorities being trapped by their desire for recognition was James Joyce, who was born and raised in Ireland when the country was still ruled by Britain.³ Joyce is not usually discussed as an anti-colonial writer, which is indeed a problematic label, if only because of his well-known mockery of Irish nationalism in *Ulysses* (plus the fact that he never gave up his British passport). What makes Joyce's early critical writings fascinating for political theorists, are the complications and ambivalences of his subtle and inquisitive position on the relationship between Britain and her Irish colony.

In his lecture 'Ireland: Island of Saints and Sages', given in Trieste in 1907, he argues for a 'moral separation' (Joyce 2000: 116) between the two countries – a phrase which implies that a complete and factual separation is neither possible nor desirable: not possible because of the manifold and deep connections between the two nations; and not desirable because a victorious anti-colonial nationalism would only unleash new forms of domination that replicate the original colonial violence, in particular in the guise of ecclesiastical and priestly authority. This, however, must not be taken as a defeatist or escapist attitude. Joyce is very much in favour of cultural self-assertion and the cultivation of a positive national self-image against belittling and offensive English notions of the Irish. Rhetorically he asks, 'Does the slave's back forget the rod?' and occasionally even expresses sympathy for 'Fenian violence' (2000: 121) against the colonizers. Moreover, his early writings are much concerned not only with the Irish case, but also with other colonial cultures in places such as Canada, India, Burma or northern Africa. At the same time, Joyce is acutely aware of the danger that the forces of resistance remain in thrall to their historical adversary without ever achieving true freedom. Joyce (and his literary alter egos from Stephen Hero to Stephen Dedalus) runs the gamut of possible sources of respectability and recognition, and finds them all wanting. The list includes the colonial state, the Catholic Church, Protestant proselytizers, the

Irish middle classes and revolutionary sects. True freedom ultimately requires a liberated form of subjectivity with no need for recognition from unexamined authorities. For this kind of freedom James Joyce uses the reference to Stephen's mythological namesake Daedalus, the prisoner of the labyrinth, who breaks free on self-fashioned wings.

'International' cooperation on a moral diet

After this brief detour, let's return to the subject of possible meanings of internationalizing and pluralizing recognition. We have seen that, although the rights and needs of non-ethnic groups such as women, gays and lesbians, or the disabled have sometimes been discussed under the heading of 'multiculturalism', the concept was first introduced by Taylor to tackle the problem of potentially separatist groups. Only these groups can enhance their otherwise benign 'will to self-assertion' (Habermas 2002: 222) to a point where the unity of the political community is threatened. Taylor's concern with the causes and dangers of the 'impending breakup' of his country can be placed in a tradition of thought that reaches back to Thucydides and his reflections on civic strife and the disintegration of political communities in ancient Greece. Mutual recognition is the modern equivalent of a polis-centred conception of citizenship. Similarly, multiculturalism is not only a moral preference, but also a governmental technique of coaxing sub-nations, metaphorical nations and alienated immigrant communities out of riots of disagreement and mutual ignorance. I conclude this essay with a few remarks on the implications of a multicultural theory of recognition for thinking about the world order.

To begin with, it is worth noting that Honneth (2012: 140) has rightly rejected the simple 'conceptual transfer' of the vocabulary of recognition theory from intersubjective to international relations. But we have seen that even self-confident minorities within nation-states often do not simply struggle for recognition, if recognition means inclusion into a pre-existing community. One reason is that, unlike individuals, group agents do not necessarily depend on recognition from outside. Recognition is constitutive of individual personhood – each of us was literally born and raised by a significant other – but groups can emerge and prosper simply because individuals create a new ethos and decide to relate to each other in certain ways, for example by setting up a secret society that by definition is not even known to outsiders. Of course, other groups such as charities, firms and states need to be recognized by outsiders in order to exist.

Groups may also come into existence as autonomous groups and then take on responsibilities towards other sections of society (Laitinen 2014).

States can be seen as akin to (very large) groups that depend on outsiders for being seen and treated as states, although it would be preposterous to argue that states need to esteem and respect like persons in order to function as members of international society. David Hume noted that 'nations can subsist without intercourse' and, further to this, 'may even subsist, in some degree, under a general war', that is, under conditions of radical disrespect from outside forces (Hume 1998: 99–100). Alexander Wendt has made a similar point: unlike individual persons, states can choose to withdraw from interaction with other states, or swallow other states through imperial expansion or voluntary fusion (Wendt 1999: 223). They can also, unlike individuals, split apart without becoming schizophrenic.

For Habermas and Honneth, ethnic or other close-knit groups are passing or even pathological phenomena which are not taken seriously as alternative sources and distributors of self-respect. Both theorists assume capitalist societies and national states in which struggles among culturally defined groups do not affect the basic homogeneity and coherence of the political community. As a consequence, they do not pay enough attention to the ways in which cultural groups are able to generate alternative value orientations which transform the experience of disrespect into sources of particularistic honour and prestige. History shows that groups do not even need to be oppressed to be good at developing narratives of their own marginalization. These narratives, in turn, lead to tighter-knit communities with values of their own and conceptions of the good life that are independent of those of other groups. The unexamined assumption of stable frameworks of pre-existing political communities or fixed cultural horizons underestimates the extent to which the identity of a political community riven by conflict can become disturbed or even disappear in the course of a conflict. In the American Civil War, for example, ideologues of the South went so as to devise separate genealogies for their 'people', and to invent a Southern 'nation' searching for their own 'country' (McCardell 1979).

The implication is that a polity, even if formally constituted, is predicated on the subjectivities of unstable and mixed multitudes. Perception and consensus are all-important. The laws and conventions which define the state in the minds of its citizens have no independent existence and can be corrupted. Taking for granted the boundaries and identity of the polity within which conflicts over recognition take place is therefore both theoretically misleading and politically naïve. Struggles for and over recognition lead to new inclusions and exclusions

that redefine the very political entity in which different people used to live together. The evil of a total loss of order threatening to destabilize the world is different, but not worse than the evil of an excess of order. With regard to international society, multiculturalists tend to emphasize the persistence of deep differences over norms and values, and are sceptical about claims regarding the spread of Western-style liberalism or the convergence of societies around the same notions of reason and modernity. If the very desire for recognition is already shaped by power relations (McBride 2013: 35), then it is unlikely that people around the world seek recognition from and respect the same institutions, and in light of the same principles. The international analogue to domestic multiculturalism is the decentring of Europe and the questioning of its civilizational primacy which by no means implies the demand to embrace the values of others.

It implies, however, a lowering of expectations of unanimity on the global stage. Habermas maintains that 'the enduring political fragmentation in the world and in Europe is at variance with the systemic integration of a multicultural world society' (Habermas 2012: 7). But these two things are not more contradictory than the right of adults, including gays and lesbians, to form their own, legally protected family units and live in a world of ever-expanding social networks. Similarly, the expansion of civic solidarity across geographical and cultural scales and boundaries should not be conceived of as happening *at the expense* of more localized or ethno-cultural loyalties, as Habermas seems to think. In his enthusiasm for centralization and 'harmonization', in particular in the European Union, Habermas thinks of national and ethno-cultural identifications as something to be overcome in a linear process of abstraction and purification, although it might be more appropriate to see them as possible counterweights against the powers of the central state and unaccountable international officials.

Notes

- 1 This is the flip side of the example given by Tocqueville in the first volume of *Democracy in America*, where he predicted that the situation of blacks in the United States would not improve substantially as a result of the abolition of slavery. He rather believed that racism would be perpetuated by the white majority's social mores which would likely become even more ingrained after its legal basis had vanished (Tocqueville 2003: 400–2). On the difference between vertical and horizontal recognition, see Ikäheimo (2014: 17).

- 2 The irony of this huge detour was that, by becoming an orthodox Muslim, Malcolm discovered that Islam is indifferent to race and as 'colourblind' as the American liberals he disliked so much. This in turn led him to soften his advocacy of black nationalism to a point where in his last years he became an advocate of international 'human rights' (Marable 2011: 305, 408). This move made him a global icon whose image has been put on a postage stamp not only in Egypt, but also in the United States.
- 3 The following remarks are inspired by and draw on Gibson (2013).