



# The politics of invasion and alliance

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## Abstract

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*What should the political priority and relation be between cultural membership, economic concerns and being a citizen of a state? I argue that individualism, economism, and nationalism all harbour the danger of hierarchising these goals with the consequential invasion or even exclusion of one another. I describe both ethnic and state nationalists as using identity to monopolise political concerns. But state or cultural identity is also colonised or marginalised by either individualist or economic politics. As alternative to invasion politics, I firstly propose that humans should be seen as negotiating with their embedding communities a plurality of identities that reflect a variety of transcendental ways of being human. These identities should then be acknowledged as equal ingredients in the empowerment and make-up of a blossoming human life. The variety of identities should therefore be developed in alliance with each other instead of being the victim of a strategy of mutual invasion or exclusion.*

## 1. Introduction

For South Africa the 1990s was an intense and sometimes traumatic process of change. In a survey of Idasa (Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa) as reported in *Rapport* of 29 October 2000, it was found that an increasing number of people evaluate the old apartheid system as better than the current one<sup>1</sup>. However, on a direct

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1 The numbers increased from 8% to 17% for blacks, 39% to 59% for whites, 11% to 41% for coloureds, 13% to 56% for Indians.

question whether they want to return to apartheid, the majority still rejects such a possibility<sup>2</sup>. In an explanation of these confusing results, Idasa points out that greater political freedom does not mean increasing economic benefits. People are therefore prepared to tolerate a stronger totalitarian government if this will bring economic well-being. To this picture we can add that all South Africans will confirm a heightened consciousness of race and the difference between African and European culture. The differences between cultures and race seem to overlap with economic classes when Thabo Mbeki recently remarked bitterly that South Africa still consists of two nations, one black and poor and the other white and rich. To remedy the situation he proposes an African Renaissance; a call which is sometimes interpreted to mean a restoration of the genius of African culture. My impression is that this interpretation is met with indifference by the European section of the population. Even the idea of this Renaissance as a constitutional and economic modernisation of Africa is not taken seriously by European South Africans. Moreover, at least one ethnic group, the Afrikaners, are nervous about cultural survival and are sometimes even in despair about survival in the broadest sense. The rest of the country on the other hand, seems to be indifferent to and even irritated by the demands for survival from the former oppressors in the face of black poverty.

It is this interrelation of civic, economic and cultural interests and apathies that present itself to me as subject for philosophical reflection. It is a reflection on political priorities, for politics is, according to Klop (1996: 315), the acquisition of power (by for instance political parties) to influence (and, we can add, prioritise) the goals that the state pursues. It is therefore significant that the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (1994b:25) gives his well-known essay on the multicultural condition the title "The Politics of Recognition", which suggests that this condition should be politically important. Richard Rorty (1999:234) on the other hand, claims that the multicultural debate should not be politically significant, at least not as significant as the economic debate. I will mainly argue against the latter viewpoint and for the notion of an equality of loyalties to, concerns over, and relations between the identities given to the self by the societal spheres in which she is embedded. I will especially argue against the invasion of culture by identities like civic affairs (state identity) or economic concerns. The invasion of state identity or economic rights by culture is of course equally reprehensible. We should rather pursue a politics of entwinement that leaves separate

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2 A return to apartheid was only supported by 13% blacks, 23% coloureds, 31% whites, and 49% Indians.

identities like that of cultural membership and being a citizen relatively intact. In other words, I will argue that the alliance between identities that remains relatively sovereign, empowers the whole self to lead a fuller and more human life.

## 2. Invasion politics

### 2.1 Nationalism

#### **How do multicultural politics envision the inter-relation of identities?**

One of its main claims is that loyalty to the state will fade if it does not show sensitivity for the other identities of its citizens. There is, in other words, a form of connection, interaction and overlap between our civic and other identities<sup>3</sup>. I will argue that this idea constitutes a truly politics of alliance only if it implies an interlacement of a plurality of identities. Taylor (1994a:10-13) argues along similar lines. He sees classical patriotism as a commitment to the polity purely because of the justice of its laws. Nationalism in distinction, is a civic commitment that goes through some extra-civic identity like a language culture. This implies for instance that the polity cannot simply assume universalised patriotism but it must be tailored to the particularity of the citizens. In this form, nationalism functions as the fuel for modern patriotism. Taylor points out that this connection between civic and extra-civic identities can also be used against the politics of difference in order to homogenise a divided citizenry. In this case of civic invasion of identities, a narrative is created to give a homogeneous extra-political identity to a fragmented country that is supposed to unite the differences to ensure civic unity. Taylor (1994b:44, 46-51) describes the latter strategy by mentioning what I want to call the state nationalism propagated by Jean Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau motivated the idea of equal honour for all citizens by saying that this equal honour is created by a common purpose. However, says Taylor, the idea of a single common goal for all ended in the tyrannising homogenisations from the Jacobins up to the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. The important point against the state nationalism Taylor describes here, is that an obsession with a common goal for a state tends to exclude or downplay all other goals. State nationalism thus goes astray when it attempts to elevate a person's civic identity to the

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3 Cf. for instance the arguments of De Dijn (1997:154-155), Kymlicka (1997:24) and Marshall (1995:519-520).

position of control identity<sup>4</sup> and usually allies it with a single extra-civic goal that supposedly unifies all communal life.

Because of the latter obsession state nationalists see the demand for a politics of difference as an attempt to divide the state and feel threatened by any politics of a plurality of extra-civic demands on the state. However, this is to ignore the implied acknowledgement of difference politics that civic and other identities, although relatively autonomous in relation to each other, cannot but be allied because the demand for recognising a plurality of identities is actually a demand for inclusion in the functioning of the state<sup>5</sup>. The homogenising model (state nationalism) assumes that a combination of the civic and a single extra-civic identity (state goal) invades all human functions. It tries to control (as far as possible) the entire lives of its citizens in order to make civic life as simple and as manageable as possible. A related attempt is that of cultural and ethnic nationalism<sup>6</sup>, which move in the direction of seeing a specific cultural identity to be of such overarching importance that it starts to invade the civic and all other identities of persons and communities to ensure a homogeneous cultural functioning. In this instance, we end up with the isolation and discrimination politics of ethnic cleansing, discrimination and separatism<sup>7</sup>.

## 2.2 Structural and directional identities

A plurality and relative independence of identities thus seems important. But this can lead to struggle politics. An instance of such a conflict is given by Taylor (1994a:17-19, 24) when he says that nationalism, multi-

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4 Gutmann (1994:6) objects quite correctly to the idea of citizenship as a “comprehensive universal identity”; people see themselves, and are publicly recognised as nothing more than equal citizens.

5 Cf. the critique of Habermas (1994:133-135) and Houston (1997:1-3, 6) in this regard on the arguments of state nationalists.

6 I use the concept of cultural nationalism in order to distinguish it from a related kind of nationalism. Ethnic nationalism can, according to Kymlicka (1997:19-20, 27) be defined as loyalty to a nation that is defined by a common race or descent. Cultural groups in distinction do not restrict membership to those who share a common ethnic descent.

7 Wolterstorff (1995:210-211) describes this “revenge of the particular” as part of the decline of modernism. Because the “ethos of liberalism” (i.e. “its values, its habits, its attitudes”) is becoming constantly “thinner in content”, its “grip on the citizenry” will become “ever more tenuous”. In other words, liberalism is not able to compete with “the emotional attachment” that particular identities are creating in the outlook of many people.

cultural politics, feminism, fundamentalist religions and the struggle against racism often compete for the same space<sup>8</sup> of what he refers to as “categorical identity”. It is important to explain this struggle for the same space. For this purpose it is useful to employ the distinction (popular in reformational circles<sup>9</sup>) between the structure and direction of reality. This distinction implies that directional plurality cannot portray the same co-existence of identities as is the case with structural plurality; directional identities harbour an inherent propensity for collision. It is important to emphasise that what makes directional phenomena, among other things, directional is their attempt to monopolise the entire human condition; it cannot allow any other identity to compete with it about the direction of life. Thus, if nationalism, feminism and multiculturalism are struggling for the same space, we can suspect them to have become directional phenomena.

Taylor (1985:34-35; 1989:27-30, 63; 1991:47; 1994b:33-34) indeed gives a directional function, content and place to identity as such. He sees identity as about a person’s stance towards the good as it is found in this person’s background framework of, significantly, strong evaluations<sup>10</sup> and commitments. The function of identity is therefore to give direction to his or her actions. Furthermore, this meaning of identity can for Taylor include spiritual or cultural identities. This implies that a particular culture can be a directional good if it functions as a horizon of meaning for our actions (Gutmann,1994:4-5; Taylor,1995:136-138, 140). The crucial question is whether such a culture becomes our identity in a totalitarian way, whether it becomes our control identity? But cultural phenomena do not necessarily need to be seen as directional in the sense of colonising the whole identity of a person (Griffioen,1995a:218; 1995b:153).

Does Taylor see identity only in a directional meaning? I do not think so because he also sees culture as part of a structural (and not directional) plurality of identities. An important Taylorian (Taylor, 1989:28-31) distin-

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8 Arab nationalism for instance had to make space for “Islam integrist” and Soviet Marxism made space for “virulent nationalisms”.

9 Cf. for instance the analyses of Griffioen (1995a:205, 216-218, 220, 222). I believe his distinctions are based on Dooyeweerd’s (1979:7-8) notion of an endless religious dialectic in distinction to an aspectual dialectic that comes to rest when each aspect finds its proper place.

10 Flanagan (1990:48-50) denies Taylor’s idea that identity is primarily created by strong evaluation. He thinks it is enough to identify “powerfully with one’s desires” or superficially with some “style or fashion” to have an identity. Flanagan nevertheless contradicts himself when he also thinks that an identity crisis is caused by some thoroughgoing problem with seeing the meaning of life.

tion is that between transcendental moral questions and their contingent answers (identities) situated in the horizon of meaning. In a reinterpretation of the Taylorian concept of identity, I want to see it as a nominal concept that actually comprises of a plurality of co-existent identities. We can call these identities contextualised functional identities since they are the local answers to transcendental questions about what might be the structure for the various functional dimensions of our lives. There should in principle not be any struggle for the same space between the various functional identities since they are the products of a variety of transcendental questions, which differentiated over time into relative autonomous aspects of the human condition. It should also be possible here to talk about co-existent identities within the same function or categorical space. The variety of cultures and even sub-cultures or dialects within the same culture or language<sup>11</sup> are for instance a contextual plurality that need not be in conflict.

The metaphors of an invading, colonising or control identity refers to any identity-component that tries to be sovereign over all aspects of life<sup>12</sup>. “Invasion” or “colonisation” are negative concepts while “control” maybe a bit more positive. The positive evaluation for the existence of a control identity is based on reformational philosophy’s centring of our fundamental and directional religious condition or relation with God; this is our Christian identity. This however, also makes it clear that not any one of our contextualised functional identities can be our control identity. When dealing with proper functional and contextual identities, we should thus start off with a plural model where the various functional identities do not try to invade and control one another.

### 2.3 The thin border for a thin identity

To realise a non-conflictual structural and contextual plurality of identities is nevertheless not the easiest task. Nationalism is for instance not bad when it behaves within the limits of this plurality. Nationalism defined as loyalty to a particular culture or national state that assumes the position of control identity is, however, quite a different matter. Taylor (1994a:25-

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11 Van der Merwe (1999:324) observes that cultural differences are between, as well as inside, cultural communities. This means “individuals and groups belong to multiple communities that demand recognition of different differences”, or “community-constituting differences”.

12 With this metaphor I have in mind what Dooyeweerd (1969:159) warns us against, namely that “the structural relation between the different aspects of an individual whole cannot be viewed as a mutual encroachment of one modal function upon the modal spheres of others”.

261;1994b:52-53, 59-61, 63-64) therefore correctly rejects radical ethnic nationalism and demands that it be curbed by a liberalism that gives equal citizenship to all, despite the particular identities that instigate nationalism. But this sets the scene for a tension between nationalism and classic liberal values, which claim to be blind to sentiments that emphasise difference<sup>13</sup>. This, however, is a tension that Taylor thinks can be managed without sacrificing the so-called universal liberties of individuals.

Critics<sup>14</sup> however, are not convinced by the notion that we can manage the tension between the politics of difference and difference-blindness. They mistrust Taylor's multicultural discourse and suggest that it will develop into an obsession with some particular identity that eventually will take over the role of control identity. This flirtation with particularism, so the argument goes, will stereotype people and compel them to give more attention to one identity component than they need to. They therefore cannot see anything more than a very thin border between the justified recognition of some identity component and being enclosed in that component<sup>15</sup>. These critics seem onto something in the sense that an identity that invades more space than its own actually disempowers in its will to power<sup>16</sup>; it disempowers the identities it colonises and thus the self as a comprehensive entity. But the affirmation of some identity nevertheless cannot be denied. Kymlicka (1997:24,37-39) very clearly articulates this delicate sense when he argues that what he sees as cultural identity in the modern context is "very thin" because it comprises almost entirely of only language and allows "differences in religion,

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13 Laforest (1993:x) comments that Taylor's thinking about nationalism is that of the "median way between extremes in accordance with the parameters of Aristotelian ethics". Fellow Canadian, Will Kymlicka (1997:14-15), makes observations about the difference between nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia, Flanders, Scotland and Puerto Rico on the one hand, and the Balkan on the other, that confirm Taylor's notion of the possibility of a liberal nationalism.

14 Cf. the critical remarks of Appiah (1994:162-163), Lötter (1998:180), Rockefeller (1994:87-89) and Wolf (1994: 76-77).

15 Oakes (1993:3) points out that these arguments take the ambiguous position that the political downplay of particular identities does not mean that these identities can be ignored.

16 This intuition is confirmed in Wolterstorff (1983:104,108) and Goudzwaard's (1984:39-41) reformational explanation of the origin of nationalism as the self-curing response of a group to a perceived injustice. Wolterstorff (1983:108-109) and Goudzwaard (1984:42-44) indicate the danger when this nationalism does not exhaust itself in its curing function. Then the restoration of an ethnic identity develops into a destructive preoccupation with itself.

personal values, family relationships or lifestyle choices” (which is of course also cultures in themselves). He nevertheless emphasises that while cultural identity nowadays is very thin, “it is far from trivial” and that attempts to homogenise people are often met with serious resistance.

The thin line between the empowerment of a thin identity and the power mongering of an imperialistic identity emphasises the need for the recognition of the separate and equal empowerments of the plurality of identities. If this plurality of empowerments is not recognised, people will constantly be the object of disempowerment in the direction of either the overemphasis, or non-recognition of some identity component.

## 2.4 Economic invasion

To add to the broader picture about the nature and extent of invasion politics, we should note that not only nationalism (and thus culture and the state) functions as an invasion force to be reckoned with in politics. A popular invader of the space for both cultural and civic identities is economic concerns<sup>17</sup>. An important exponent of this kind of politics is Rorty, who wants us to focus on economic reform to the neglect of the politics of difference.

The politics of difference sometimes claim that a “new world economic order” is dependent on the creation of a “new world cultural order” (Balslev, 1991:62, 68). Rorty (1991:77-79, 86-89) does not agree and argues that the only change towards economic equality will come once all capital is no longer concentrated in the West. The question of cultural otherness, he says, is therefore not relevant to the question of the poor Third World on how to get economic resources more evenly distributed. Rorty nevertheless undermines this stark materialistic viewpoint when he points to cultural and religious value systems like the Calvinist view of predestination and Indian or Japanese caste systems that keep the poor down. He accordingly also argues for a Western-style secular worldview to assist the change to a new world economic order. Rorty in other words, cannot but acknowledge some influence from the self-image and

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<sup>17</sup> Some development theorists and Third World leaders, according to De Vries (1990:165, 174, 176) justify the violation of human rights in order to achieve a high rate of economic growth. However, says De Vries, economic concerns cannot justify extremities like mass arrests, expulsions, abductions, murder, rape and forced starvation. More importantly, De Vries makes a basic point I also want to use concerning the relation between culture and economics. He namely says that “economic rights should not take priority over political rights, but rather are or can be interactive and reinforcing”.



world-view embedded in our cultural and religious traditions on the economic situation a person finds herself in.

Despite this discrepancy, he insists that economic concerns should take priority in politics. Rorty (1998a:76-81, 84-91;1999:231-234) argues that the older (American) reformist Left saw the prime social sin as that of selfishness, which manifests itself in a relentless capitalism. In recent decades, however, the postmodern cultural Left has come to see this position as unable to solve another crime, sadism (i.e. to misrecognise a person's identity) through economic means. Although the struggle against sadism has had some success, the selfishness of the capitalistic cosmopolitan (globalising) elite is again on the rise. For Rorty this is a sign that we cannot focus on both the politics of economic equality and the politics of difference. He warns that the evil of selfishness will not fade simply because sadism is opposed. In other words, he seems not to believe in the notion of an automatic causal relation between the two forms of evil. He therefore concludes that we need a return to a leftist or reformist economic politics and a renewed resistance to selfishness. This, he says, should be done by a globalised reformist Left and a global polity, which focus mainly on economic issues<sup>18</sup>.

There is, nevertheless, in Rorty's approach to focus on selfishness the same one-sidedness that he too identifies with the cultural Left who wants to deal with only sadism in the hope that in some miraculous way this will also solve the problems of selfishness.<sup>19</sup> There is indeed a reciprocal relation between selfish people and sadists in the sense that a sadist can use selfishness to be cruel and a selfish person will find it easy to sadistically shrug off the economic needs of the culturally other. But the problems of the two groups are not necessarily or mechanistically connected. It is therefore better, as Rorty (1998c:8; 1999:234-237) half-heartedly also acknowledges, to reject the notion of automatic causality and combat sadism as well as selfishness in a joint operation on both fronts of the political war against cruelty. It is important to note that, despite this concession, Rorty still sees political bodies to be actively involved in equalising the economic survival of people. This active role is not true of his view of equalising the chances of survival of other

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18 It is interesting to note how the same disengagement between economy and culture takes place in the conservative criticism of Horowitz (1998:3-4) on Rorty who, although he disagrees with Rorty's economic views, also thinks this is where the focus should be.

19 Maas (1999:3) indeed accuses Rorty of falling into the same trap that he thinks the cultural Left has fallen into.

identities<sup>20</sup>. Although the later Rorty is nearing the view that economic and cultural politics should form an alliance, he still leaves the door open for economic concerns to colonise politics, and in the end our other identities too.

### 3. Alliance politics

The latter suggestion of an alliance indicates that we should go further than a mere rejection of the politics of invasion. It should actually be noted that the impulse to invade is based on a very basic ontological truth, namely that we live in a universe where all that exists are interlaced<sup>21</sup>. To explain how this interlacement is attained we can mention Dooyeweerd's (1969:628-630, 632-633, 636-639) concept of *enkapsis*. He sees it as alternative to firstly the universalist view that the relation between societal spheres should be that of a metaphysical organic whole to its parts. But *enkapsis* also implies the alternative to another popular concept of interaction, namely the atomistic and mechanist view which identifies the universe with a natural scientific system of elementary physical causal relations. To explain *enkapsis* Dooyeweerd uses the example of a tree. A tree cannot be seen as a completely independent isolated substance, nor does it function thus. It is clear that the tree will not be able to escape the cosmic coherence between the tree and its environment (*Umwelt*). Dooyeweerd (1969:636) therefore describes *enkapsis* as "an interwovenness of individuality-structures". It is important to note that the "enkaptically interwoven thing with an independent individuality structure of its own is influenced by this union with another thing only in such a way that the interwoven thing maintains its internal structural law" (Dooyeweerd, 1969:639). This means that especially whole-part relations are evaded in this respect because upholding the individuality structures and separate leading function of the intertwining things in the enkaptic structure safe-guards the relative autonomy of the connecting things. The plural model for identity will have to be complemented with this notion of *enkapsis* or, what I want to call in the context of multiculturalism, a politics of alliance. In other words, we need a view of our identity as an *enkapsis* of identities given to us by the variety of societal spheres to which we belong.

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20 Habermas (1994:107-109) also categorises both economic and cultural issues as politically important. In the case of identity politics, however, Habermas too is not sure that marginalised cultures need guarantees of survival.

21 Cf. Griffioen's (1995a:220-225) emphasis on the relative autonomy but simultaneous coherence of the variety of structures of society.

### 3.1 Economy in alliance

Taylor seems to be onto this enkaptic trail when he does not, like Rorty, give economic reform an almost indisputable primacy and thus assumes that it will automatically originate a fair dispensation for our cultural identities. He is in fact less univocal in his general strategy towards moral dilemmas than Rorty and tries to accommodate a plurality of moral ideals to motivate cultural, economic and political practices. Taylor (1991:11-12, 22-23, 94-107) is, for instance, not one-sidedly pessimistic or optimistic about the impact of cultural practices like individualism, subjectivism, or instrumental reason and technology on our civilisation. He argues that if we identify and retrieve the moral ideals behind these practices, we will be able to give alternative moral frames in which we can see them and which will bring out the better manifestation of these practices. He acknowledges for instance that the popular ideals for instrumental reason are dominance and a kind of disengaged freedom. But, he says, the benevolent aim of relieving suffering should also play an important role in motivating instrumental reason. It means, he says, that we are facing a never-ending struggle between dominance and benevolence in which we should never allow dominance to get the upper hand in practising instrumental reason. It is this strategy to see a multitude of moral ideals behind our political practices, which Taylor also employs in his attempt to give the politics of difference some priority.

Rorty portrays the need for economic equality as a kind of “iron cage” argument against difference politics; we are inescapably forced to give economic arguments and concerns primacy. Taylor acknowledges that identity politics do not have the aim of bringing about a difference blind equality, as is the case with economic reform (Taylor, 1994b:39-40). However, in addition to the equality ideal, Taylor also observes an important common moral ideal behind economic and identity politics. Taylor (1994a:14-15; 1995:281) points out that in both cases the legitimacy of democracy is under threat because a section of the population feels ignored. He therefore thinks that recognition measures are needed to deal with the sense of marginalisation of the poor as well as a cultural minority. The democratic ideal of giving all an effective hearing (recognition) thus points in the direction of an alliance between civic and economic, as well as between civic and cultural concerns.

Taylor is nevertheless sensitive not to implement alliances with the disguised aim of invasion. I have in mind for instance the distortions of invasion when economic concerns join forces with only a person’s civic identity to form state nationalism. According to Taylor (1994a:1-6, 13-14) this takes place in the argument that a modernising economy demands from the state a linguistically homogenised citizenry that can easily be

relocated to where economic activity takes place<sup>22</sup>. For Taylor (1994a:5-6, 13-14) this functionalist argument is incomplete. If a certain section does not abide by the cultural homogenisation, strife will be inherent to that state. In this case, multicultural provisions (e.g. multilinguality) would be a more “economic” solution. A distortion towards the opposite of cultural and even ethnic homogenisation is also possible. Economic safety and security are usually the main issues that instigate the ethnic nationalism of the lower economic classes (Taylor, 1993:21-22; 1994a: 19-21). Although this seems like the opposite of the unholy invading alliance between state nationalism and economic empowerment, it is the same kind of colonising politics. In the first case, cultural identity is confronted with a struggle on two fronts, against state nationalism and economism. In the latter case, the civic identity is invaded by a combination of ethnic and economic politics.

However, if we read Taylor (1993:3-5, 8,10; 1994a:15-16, 25) carefully there is another possibility, one that stands for a plurality of ideals with the potential to evade invasion politics. He gives the example of the professional elite of francophone Quebec for whom non-recognition of their identity is the important cause of nationalistic sentiments. This nationalism is not a traditionalism, and is prepared to modernise (and presumably also to reform economic policy). It is, however, not prepared to be culturally engulfed by a modernisation that annihilates all inherited identity traits. This nationalism thus operates with a “call-to-differ” in the process of change towards a modern economic situation. For Taylor this is to rely partially on one’s cultural tradition to carry one into the new practices<sup>23</sup>. This is an acknowledgement of the empowerment connected to being embedded in a cultural tradition. It can of course happen that Taylor’s formulation falls out in the direction of a kind of national-socialism<sup>24</sup> that can be misused by populism or ethnicism. To counter this, we will have to constantly keep in mind that we should implement an interlacement of a variety of identities given to us by social structures that

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22 Kymlicka (1997:28) adds that national governments also want a common culture to promote “social equality and political cohesion”.

23 Kymlicka (1997:33-34) affirms this sense when he explains why many staunch nationalists nowadays are also liberal reformers. He argues that people participate in social practices when they agree with the meanings attached to it. But then they have to understand these meanings which are embedded in a shared vocabulary or culture. He therefore concludes that cultures are not valuable in themselves, but because they give us access to other social practices like that of being a citizen.

24 Baier (1988:593) indeed thinks we get from Taylor some “form of decentralised socialism”.

each has its own structure and goal that need to be co-ordinated with the goals of other structures. This implies for instance that the main function of a person's civic identity is about the social need to be treated equally and fairly – a need that should be administered by the state. But this function of the state cannot exist on its own; the entwinement between this function and the functions of other societal spheres assumes that it is the others that define the goals for equal treatment. It is in this sense that we can claim that patriotism goes through our extra-civic identities like economic status and cultural identity.

### 3.2 Self-creation and authenticity

It can thus be argued that we need an entwinement and co-operation between the identities we get from the various societal spheres in which we are embedded. But we need to be even more specific with this argument. We should also emphasise that we need an entwinement between our sense of individual identity and power, and the fact that we cannot have this sense without being embedded in communal societal spheres. The downgrading of the communal nature of identities is usually associated with the individualism of classic liberalism.

Classic liberalism is portrayed as a less aggressive homogenising politics than the attempt by state nationalism to reduce all persons to their civic identities. Liberalism rejects the idea of a general collective will, goal and equalisation of all roles. It is only concerned with an equality of individual rights. It therefore looks sceptically towards state recognition of particular identities. Liberals usually regard this kind of recognition as a pretence to discriminate against individuals who do not fit into these particularities. It is important to note that this perspective argues from the assumption that our entire human identity is focused on individual autonomy; if some communal identity is favoured, the immediate liberal reaction is that the freedom of the individual to determine his own good is hampered (Taylor, 1994b:51-57). Liberalism can nevertheless acknowledge the notion that identity is a configuration of diverse communal identities. This viewpoint seems even to reject the centring of one of these identities. It nevertheless wants people to individually create themselves by combining in an endless process their various possibilities for identity. For this to happen, individuals should be free from any form of communal pressure to conform to only one identity ideal. In fact, for liberals the ability to freely create oneself, must be the prominent part of everyone's identity<sup>25</sup>.

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25 I here have in mind Lötter (1998:182, 184-186, 188, 194, 195) as a recent South African exponent of this liberal recognition. Kymlicka's (1997:22, 34) advocacy of a liberal nationalism makes the same point.

This vision of plurality is nevertheless somewhat self-refuting for it seems to think a person should be free to choose/create her or his own identity except for not being free not to create him or herself. It is as if this liberal position foresees the self-creating ability as a substantial core behind the integration of the various identities and all actions that flow from these identities. This smacks of a new focusing of identity on the personal capacity for self-creation. The concern with individual creative freedom is probably a reaction to the communitarian obsession with communal identities. This evaluation nevertheless cannot avoid the centring of the self-creative individual that causes the atomistic situation where people always have to choose for individual autonomy as identity component and reject all communal identities. Liberalism thus is still in need of a view that would not put us before this kind of choice.

Taylor (1989:28-29, 35-36; 1991:47-50, 66, 82;1994b:28-37) is seeking a way out of this dilemma between individual self-creation and communal formation with his use of the Romantic notion of authenticity. Authenticity emphasises the ability of individuals and cultural groups to connect inwardly with an own unique identity. For Taylor the concept of authenticity is not a simple subjectivism and particularism since it also assumes external sources to reveal themselves inside the self or group. In fact, Taylor even claims that the sources of our authentic identities are for the larger part beyond the individual self. He has mainly the self's conversation with its community in mind, which means that the genesis as well as the maintenance of the self's identity is dialogical. This implies, according to Gutmann (1994:6-7), among other things that disengagement between individual self-creation and being informed by communal identities should never arise because people will always be partly created by the communities in which they are embedded. This view means the capacity for creation includes two moments, the personal as well as the communal or traditional. Neither of these should invade our entire creative ability but neither of them can be ignored in the process of culture creation. If the communal side is centred, we move in the direction of deviant forms of nationalism and socialism. If the personal empowerment for cultural action is centred, we end with the individualistic attempt to self-create *de novo*. The only alternative, therefore, is that of co-operation.

But the acknowledgement of the need for something beyond the individual self in order to realise the ideal of self-creation is only the beginning of the Romantic story of authenticity. Despite his under-evaluation of difference, Rorty (1991:19-20, 78-80) mentions what he calls the Romantic "love of the exotic" (i.e. a yearning for difference or variety) that creates the conditions for "self-enhancement". He agrees that exotic cultures keep alive in us alternative traditions of speaking and acting and

the fact that Western culture can be wrong on some things. He, nevertheless does not want a situation of fixed exotic differences. He claims that the pragmatic use of difference intends only a difference from what one is accustomed to. This means, according to Rorty, that differences in one's own culture can be enough. The emphasis is on self-enlargement and not on preserving some tradition, he says. Critics point out that this mild form of ethnocentrism portrays a dangerous self-enclosurement, which might also heighten conflict and misunderstanding (De Dijn, 1997:151, 156; Balslev, 1991:60-61). Rorty's attempt to reduce differences to a mild sameness thus seems to refute the empowering purpose of authentic self-enhancement in the "love of the exotic" that he also claims to believe in. The important implication of this moment of self-defeat in the thinking of Rorty underlines that the need for personal self-enhancement cannot succeed without a co-existent and co-operative plurality of cultures.

Cultural uniqueness as part of one's self-identity should thus be added to answer the fundamental yearning for authenticity in human beings. The practical value of this yearning is that it creates the conditions for cross-pollination between cultures<sup>26</sup>. We can also argue that cultural diversity serves as the condition of having alternatives against which one can measure the value of one's own cultural identity and practices. Moderate Romantic arguments for cultural diversity thus make room for seeing an inseparable bond between non-homogenised cultures in order to promote self-enhancement. It is important that this alliance never transform itself into a homogenised force for then it will lack its true strength, that is variety that enables self-enhancement and -reform.

### 3.3 Recognition and empowerment

Taylor supports the communitarian correction to individualism but also rejects a purely communalistic formation of the self. He rather sees identity as moulded by the ongoing dialogue we have with others or our community. Taylor (1991:45-46, 50; 1994a:16-19; 1994b:25-26, 31, 36-37, 64-66) argues that this dialogical condition of personhood has risen in prominence in modern times because of the collapse of given ontological and social hierarchies. To not have an inherited social identity causes the recognition of one's identity by others to become increasingly important. We are seemingly at the point where Taylor is justified in putting forward a recognition thesis for modern politics. This thesis implies that a person's identity is crucially formed by the mis/recognition

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26 Roodt (2000a:3-4; 2000b:1, 5) strongly emphasises (even overemphasises) this argument.

of others. It is said for instance that women who have internalised a picture of inferiority will not excel even when the objective obstacles to their advancement are removed. With reference to Franz Fanon's rejection of the self-image of being colonised given by the colonisers, Taylor also points out that the non-recognition of a person or cultural group's identity by others can cause a crippling self-hatred. Taylor (1993:10-13, 21; 1994b:64-66) furthermore explains the impact of non-recognition with the example of the resurging nationalist sentiments among the professional elite of francophone Quebec. He argues that this elite will indicate inequality and exploitation as the main issues of their nationalism. Taylor, however, suggests that the issue is rather about the misrecognition that forges a demeaning identity<sup>27</sup>.

With the latter explanation Taylor gives the impression to some<sup>28</sup> that multiculturalism is not about the usual power issues but about a lesser issue of self-image and recognition of this image. Does this perception imply that we can underplay the importance of power by means of recognition politics? It is, however, important to observe the inequality of power relations between those who demand recognition and those from whom recognition is demanded. Taylor implicitly acknowledges this role of power in recognition politics when he points out that non-recognition can seriously harm the self-image of "the other" We therefore have to emphasise the fact that recognition of cultural identity asks for fairness in relations that are sensitive to the empowerment a good public image can give. Thus, the question is not whether identity is about power or not, but rather how we will eventuate a fair balance of power because both non-recognition and overemphasising some identity will ultimately indicate a misuse of power.

We should pause for a moment to ask a last fundamental question: What is the power connected to culture? First something about culture: Rorty (1998b:188) sees it as part of the contextualisation of human communities. It is something every army barrack, monastery, university and so on has. It is furthermore clear that all of us belong to a variety of cultures because all of us belong to more than one contextualised human

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27 Kymlicka (1997:14) also argues that because there are not any more statistically significant differences in income or wealth between francophones in Quebec and the anglophones, the only issue that drives francophone nationalism is a desire for recognition. He, nevertheless, acknowledges a lower income for francophones outside Quebec than that of anglophones. This, however, might indicate (but not for Kymlicka) a connection between cultural empowerment and economic empowerment.

28 Nicholson (1996:4-7; 2-15) for instance argues that Taylor does not recognise power relations.



community. In this sense culture is indeed something that will necessarily manifest multi-culturally. We therefore see the emergence of diverse groups like language groups, feminists and religious groupings mobilising themselves for the recognition of their language, gender and religious cultures or identities. This brings me to the reason for the latter mobilisation for power. Rorty stumbles on something more than only a superficial recognition of identity when he defines culture as a set of shared habits that enables the members of a contextualised community to get along with one another and their environment. According to this definition, culture is about power to deal with one's circumstances.

But power needs to be approached with care. The postmodern notion, which claims that all there is to being human and living with other humans is the will to power, needs to be rejected (Taylor, 1994b:68-71; Wolterstorff, 1995:213-214). However, this does not imply that legitimate power has nothing in common with something like our cultural way of being. In this regard, we can employ the less totalitarian and less brute concept of empowerment (i.e. investing someone with legal power). From the Dooyeweerdian tradition and others<sup>29</sup>, we learn that the cultural way of being is about empowering a person to control the world around him or her in a creative manner. Although this power is a personal possession, it is partly given also from inside a collective tradition that carries certain creative possibilities<sup>30</sup>. These two dimensions of culture seem to be reconcilable with Taylor's dialogical condition and recognition thesis; this is the idea that an empowering identity is something we (as persons) negotiate with the community in which we are embedded. The point is, we are embedded in particular cultural identities which empower us to interact creatively with our surroundings.

#### 4. Conclusion

It seems as if we can distinguish a historical evolvement or disclosure of at least three identity components we get from the societal spheres in which we are embedded. These three identify components have political importance in the modern world because of the empowerment they mediate.

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29 Together with Rorty (1998b:188), Kymlicka (1997:22) also says that a person's cultural identity "provides the most important context within which people develop and exercise their autonomy".

30 The "personal and collective aspects of empowerment to creatively control the surrounding world" is my version of part of Dooyeweerd's (1979:66-67, 70-71) explanation of the cultural aspect.

- The first is a demand that the state should recognise the equality of all human beings, all human aspects and all social dimensions and institutions before the law in distinction to the pre-modern social hierarchies.
- This demand manifest itself secondly specifically in the recognition of the economic dignity and security of all human beings.
- To this, we have to add the demand for the recognition of identities like culture, sexuality and so on, of persons.

In the practical functioning of the modern world, the last two is because of the first, a demand to maximise equal economic means and the recognition of cultures. It implies a search for an economic and cultural condition of dignity and security for all human beings. In Rorty's terms, it is a search for rising beyond selfishness and sadism. That these ideals are put against each other in practical politics is clear. Equality is seen by many as a universal demand while authenticity is seen as its particularist denial. Furthermore, the demand for economic integrity is seen by many as a more important need than the recognition of difference. This is the practical situation. I believe, however, that one of our modern political issues need to be that these demands should not, in a return of pre-postmodern ontological stances, be hierarchised or centred with the concomitant suppression and dialectical backlash of some of these identities. They should rather be promoted as allied forces in the undertaking to disclose life's full potential.

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### **Kernbegrippe:**

ekonomiese belange  
identiteit  
klassieke liberalisme  
multikulturalisme  
politiek van erkenning  
staats- en etniese nasionalisme

### **Key concepts:**

classical liberalism  
economic interests  
identity  
multiculturalism  
politics of recognition  
state and ethnic nationalism