

TWO ESSAYS ON THE UNIVERSAL AND PARTICULAR DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE

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Thesis presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

at the

University of Stellenbosch.

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March 2002

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Preface

In the following two essays the term culture is considered from the perspective of two topical debates in the field of cultural criticism. The first relates to globalisation and its impact on culture, while the second considers the current interest in multiculturalism. In both instances debate has been heated on opposing sides – anti-globalists claim that globalisation homogenises culture and anti-multiculturalists claim that multiculturalism is nothing other than an effort to keep cultures apart in something akin to what South Africa once knew as “separate development.”

On both these matters the opposite is argued. Globalisation and multiculturalism refer to social processes where the universal and the particular dimensions of culture interact in such a fashion as to influence both these dimensions. Any exchange between the two poles operates in two directions and not merely from universal to particular. For globalisation this means that homogenisation of particular cultures into a universal mold does not take place, and for multiculturalism it means that a person’s culture does not tie her absolutely to her group. However, it also means that global processes do impact on local situations, and a person’s culture does determine her identity. The important feature is that the process also takes place in the opposite direction: local action also has a global impact, and a person’s free choice to situate herself within certain cultural and social milieus also impacts on her identity.

In both essays the term culture will be used to designate the attempt by human beings to make life, individually and collectively, meaningful on an existential level. This includes cultural products such as works of art and literature, but it also goes wider to describe all the practices and ways in which people make their lives meaningful by communicating with each other. Wherever culture does not fulfil this existential function, it is deemed unfit and in need of adaptation. Cultural change is therefore an important aspect of culture.

The essays are presented in the order in which they were written. The first, titled *Babel or Piraeus? Globalisation, Culture and Tradition*, was presented at the conference *Ethnicity in an Age of Globalisation*, held at Uganda Martyrs University, Kampala, Uganda, from 3-6

September 2001. The second essay, titled *Between Freedom and Culture: Alain Finkielkraut's critique of multiculturalism* (starting on page 34 of this publication), was written more recently. This essay follows the normal Harvard reference method, whereas the references in the first essay are made by footnotes in accordance with the requirements of the conference where it was presented. Uganda Martyrs University plans to publish the conference proceedings during the course of 2002.

I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. W.L. van der Merwe for his expert guidance in both essays, as well as a special word of thanks to my friends Stan du Plessis and Hugo Theron for very helpful suggestions and hours of discussions. The views expressed here, however, remain my own.

Stellenbosch
February 2002

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Babel or Piraeus?

Globalisation, Culture and Tradition

Abstract:

The conception of globalisation as a “programme” or “project” driven by a group of people or companies with a set agenda underlies much of the antagonistic discussion of globalisation. Protagonists of globalisation, in turn, often describe the process as inevitable progress. This paper analyses the process of globalisation and argues that it should not be understood as such a singular process. Rather, the concept “complex connectivity” – where the local and the global come into closer contact and influence, or interpenetrate, one another more directly – facilitates a more nuanced analysis of globalisation. This understanding of globalisation will be tested against the phenomenon of culture by posing two questions: Does globalisation lead to the destruction of local culture(s) by an encroaching singular global culture (i.e. is globalisation cultural imperialism)? Or alternatively: Does globalisation represent an opening up and exchange between previously isolated cultures and societies? This paper argues in favour of the second position by employing John Tomlinson’s existential definition of culture and his understanding of the dialectic that exists between the local and the global in complex connectivity. Instead of global culture, we can more properly speak of “globalized” culture, which looks different in every local situation. This is a more optimistic answer to the cultural effects of globalisation, and although some concerns remain, it seems clear that to understand globalisation as complex connectivity rules out many of the charges of cultural imperialism lodged against globalisation.

Opsomming:

Baie van die hedendaagse antagonistiese diskussie oor globalisasie gaan uit van die veronderstelling dat globalisasie ’n ‘program’ of ’n ‘projek’ is wat deur ’n groep individue of maatskappye gedryf word. Voorstanders van globalisasie, daarenteen, beskou die proses dikwels as ‘onafwendbare vooruitgang.’ Hierdie opstel analiseer die proses van globalisasie en argumenteer dat globalisasie nie as so ’n eenduidige proses verstaan moet word nie. Die konsep “complex connectivity” word ingespan om ’n meer genuanseerde analise van globalisasie te bied aangesien dit dui op die komplekse interaksie, of selfs interpenetrasie, tussen plaaslike en globale prosesse. Hierdie opvatting oor globalisasie word getoets aan die hand van kultuur deur twee teenstellende vrae te stel: Is globalisasie ’n enkelvoudige globale kultuur wat dreig om plaaslike kulture oor te neem en uiteindelik te vernietig (ook genoem kultuurimperialisme)? Of eerder: Is globalisasie ’n geleentheid tot groter openheid en interaksie tussen kulture en gemeenskappe wat voorheen van mekaar geïsoleer was? Die opstel argumenteer ten gunste van die tweede posisie deur gebruik te maak van John Tomlinson se eksistensiële definisie van kultuur en sy opvatting oor die interaksie tussen die plaaslike en die globale. Insteede van globale kultuur kan ons eerder praat van ‘geglobeerde’ kultuur, wat telkens anders lyk in elke plaaslike opset. Hierdie posisie bied ’n versigtige, maar meer optimistiese antwoord op die kulturele impak van globalisasie deurdat veel van die aanklagte van kultuurimperialisme teen globalisasie afgewys word.

1. Introduction

It seems that over the past decade there has been a sharpening of contradictory viewpoints in the heated debate on globalisation. Views range from so-called techno-utopianism and the road to prosperity for all, to sceptics who see in the global economy a conspiracy to further enrich the affluent at the expense of the world's poor and the environment, confounded by claims of cultural homogenisation and institutional oppression. More than often such sentiments spill into the streets during international economic meetings, while many of the ethnic conflicts and wars that the past decades have witnessed may also be ascribed to this confusion.

The divergence between these positions may also be traced in contemporary philosophers, for instance between Samuel Huntington's expectation of conflict and Jürgen Habermas' expectation of civilization.¹ Huntington predicts clashes between groups, which he bases on a pessimistic anthropology combined with the proximity that the interconnectedness of our world brings. In contrast, Habermas sees interconnectedness as an opportunity to shift toward a paradigm of mutual understanding and dialogue. The problem seems to be that we do not quite have the tools to think ethically and culturally about the situation that globalisation has generated. Our moral and ethical categories are no longer adequate to deal with the complexity of our lives. Zygmunt Bauman² refers to the numbing effect that interconnectedness has on our moral and ethical choices:

“[T]he scale of possible consequences of human action have long outgrown the moral imagination of the actors. Knowingly or unknowingly, our actions affect territories and times much too distant for the ‘natural’ moral impulses which struggle in vain to assimilate them, or abandon the struggle altogether. Morality which we inherited from pre-modern times – the only morality we have – is a morality of proximity, and as such woefully inadequate in a society in which all important action is an action on distance.”

This paper will seek to explore these complex situations in an effort to understand the effects of interconnectedness and proximity better, and based on this explain the divergent reactions to globalisation. To do this it will be necessary to explore globalisation and its impact in its many facets, emphasising the structure of the global economy as a main driving force. However, the focus of the paper will be on the cultural dimension of globalisation – the claim

¹ Farhang Rajaei, *Globalization on Trial*, Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2000, pp. 88-91.

² Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993, p. 217.

that we are entering a “global culture” that will wipe away cultural (and ethnic) diversity and particularism.

It will be argued, following the British sociologist John Tomlinson that the dichotomy between the local and the global ought to be replaced by a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between universalism and particularism. These insights will be tested not only against the concept of culture, but also against those of tradition, modernity and ethnicity. Kwame Gyekye’s specifically African perspective on these matters will also be related to the debate on globalisation.

The underlying problematic here is whether we need to fear the advent of globalisation in its economic, cultural, technological and political impact, or whether the possibility exist to steer clear of its pitfalls toward the possibility of humanity.

2. What is Globalisation?

“The World is 10 Years Old!” announces Thomas Friedman, quoting an advertisement of a large financial firm that appeared in 1998: “It started when the Wall fell in 1989. ... The spread of free markets and democracy around the world is permitting more people everywhere to turn their aspirations into achievements. And technology, properly harnessed and liberally distributed, has the power to erase not just geographical borders but also human ones.”³ Although the advertisement is phrased in the typical optimism of big brands, it may be argued that the fall of the Berlin Wall together with various other events a decade ago did herald something of a new era – this was also the year that the Ayatollah Khomeini died (ending Iran and to a extent Islam’s religious exclusivity), the year that the Swiss scientist Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web, and important for South Africa, the year that president PW Botha was replaced by FW de Klerk, who lead much of the political transformation to follow.

This sense of opening up and “erasure” – or rather negating – of borders has led some to argue that this new era called globalisation signifies a transition in our predominant mode of

³ Quoted in Thoman Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, 1999, London: HarperCollins, 2000, p. xvi.

production from industry to information.⁴ The events of 1989 are seen as symptoms of an information revolution with electronic communication technologies and mass media as its powerful vehicle. Conversely, globalisation is described as the changes that we have seen in the areas of technology, information and economy over the past decade.

True as this may be, such an understanding falls short of explaining the social and cultural complexities that arise from globalisation. It doesn't capture how these technologies and the erasure of boundaries have transformed the way we think about time and space. Furthermore, it is not correct to assume that the industrial mode of production will be eclipsed by the information mode, since the latter is to a large extent based on the former. What we are experiencing now is also not the first era of globalisation in history. The previous era of globalisation extended from the 1870's until the mid 1920's and was coupled with the eradication of various natural borders (the inventions of the steamship, telegraph, railroad and the telephone), facilitating an increase in trade and human movement.⁵ Although clearly limited to a smaller part of the world (western Europe and their important colonies) and brought to an abrupt end with the First World War, the erasure of borders and increase of flow in goods and information does not as such represent anything new. Finally, to propose that the current era of globalisation came into existence in 1989 ignores the fact that the convergence of markets and countries, which points to increasing globalisation, is observable from the 1950's, shortly after the end of the Second World War. Therefore, to simply describe the changes we have seen in technology, information and economy over the past decade does not provide us with enough material to come to understand the full impact of globalisation on our lives. It does not adequately answer how we have bent our minds to come to think of the world as a "global village".

In his book *Globalization and Culture*, John Tomlinson⁶ offers an alternative explanation: he understands globalisation in terms of "complex connectivity," pointing to proximity or the apparent compression of physical and social distance between human beings as the key difference with previous eras. Of course when measured in standard units New York is still, almost stubbornly, 5500 kilometres away and 5 hours behind London, but our perception and

⁴ cf. Rajae, *Globalization on Trial*, 2000, p. 9.

⁵ Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, p. xvii; Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, London: Sage, 1992, p. 59.

⁶ John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999, p. 1.

experience of such boundaries have changed: I can now take the 19:00 flight from Cape Town to Amsterdam and arrive in time for a 09:00 appointment the following morning, or I can dial a 12-digit number from a cellular phone to speak to someone in Sao Paulo, or communicate with a friend in Japan on a “live” internet chat-line. We live in a networked society with ever-densening links criss-crossing between individuals and collectives in all the different modalities of the cultural, economic, political, technological and social-institutional spheres. But the effect is also the other way around: from the ‘outside world’ into my local world. Distant events influence and penetrate into our local social and economic situations much more immediately. Tomlinson follows Anthony Giddens in defining globalisation as

“the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. ... Globalization concerns the intersection of presence and absence, the interlacing of social relations and social events ‘at distance’ with local contextualities.”⁷

He identifies the globalised human condition as one of “deterritorialization”, the transformation of our relation to space and to time due to the effect of ‘remote’ forces in our daily lives.⁸ Our material conditions and cultural practices are influenced by global events, images and capital flows in such a way as to lift us out of our locally situated lives. Our identity is continually challenged to accommodate this ever-broadening horizon.

How is this apparent compression of distance matched on a cultural level? Does our connectedness and the experience of a ‘global village’ imply the advent of a singular global culture? Today, a visitor from San Francisco driving down a street in Singapore sees many familiar advertisements, clothing styles and motor vehicles. Does globalisation result in the homogenisation of the world and the destruction of cultural and ethnic minorities? The question of the one and the many is of course as old as humanity itself, but it is brought into a specific context and focus by the presumably totalising (as some critics would have it) force of globalisation – and, importantly, the backlash against this force in the form of heightened ethnic identification and often, resulting conflicts. The process of integration is therefore supplemented by an equally strong force for differentiation.

⁷ Anthony Giddens, in Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, p. 47.

⁸ Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, p. 106.

The sociologist Roland Robertson provides a helpful framework to understand these forces by pointing to four major reference points in the global field: national societies, individuals, the world system of societies, and humankind.⁹ For him the global-human condition is ordered between these four aspects or interests, and each one has a specific relation to the other three, relativising its claim to precedence over the others. Although his model will not be discussed here, it leads at least to an appreciation of the complexity of globalisation within the sense of “involving wholeness and inclusivity.” Just as time and space stubbornly resists compression, even when experienced as such, culture also resists compression into a singular form, because culture remains situated in a local place and time. Still, it seems fair to assume the prevalence of an underlying cultural unity, which evokes a sense of unfolding ‘global culture.’ It is in the light of this sense that the many objections against globalisation is made, namely its proposed homogenisation, its universalistic tendencies, its westernisation, and its intrinsic relation to modernity’s ‘grand narratives.’

These matters will be discussed at greater length below. For the moment it might be worthwhile to explore the material experience of globalisation, namely the ways in which it has changed our global economies and technologies and with it our experiences of the social world. Though globalisation is by no means ‘one-dimensional’ to be conceptualised purely as an economic event, the material changes produced by globalisation in the lives of many people warrants some clarification as it has been the source of much confusion. In addition, the effect of complex connectivity is clearly illustrated in the economic sphere.

3. Global economy

The journalist Thomas Friedman’s book on the relation between the global and the local (to which he refers to as the Lexus – a luxury motor vehicle - and the olive tree – his symbol for locally cherished values) is filled with anecdotes about the material experience of globalisation – from the behaviour of markets and capital, industries, economic and social policies to mobility, media, communication, information technologies and more. He provides one with a genial feel of the connectivity and proximity that globalisation has brought. Although Friedman does not propose a conceptual scheme for analysing the global reality, he does point to three fundamental changes that helped “blow down the walls of the Cold War

⁹ Robertson, *Globalization*, pp. 25-27.

system and enable the world to come together as a single, integrated, open plain.”¹⁰ These are the three democratisations of technology, finance and information.

With the democratisation of technology he refers to the explosion of communication technologies during the past few decades, especially since the late 1980’s when digitisation and miniaturisation enabled people to exchange larger pieces of information further, faster and cheaper than ever before. Once the information, be it electronic documents, sound waves or images, had been transformed into digital format it could instantly be sent by telephone lines, satellites or fibre optic cables around the world. The result is that more and more people can “get connected” and exchange information of private and professional content. Once connected, every person has the ability to produce knowledge and services, no matter in which part of the world they are. “What this democratization of technology means is that the potential for wealth creation becomes geographically dispersed, giving all kinds of previously disconnected people the chance to access and apply knowledge.”¹¹ Increasingly large companies are taking advantage of this by outsourcing their work to countries with lower labour costs, typically in the developing world.

The democratisation of finance points to another lowering of borders: where previously it was mainly the large international banks and lenders who handed out credit (according to strict requirements, making money hard to come by¹²), the explosion of the bond market in the 1980’s enabled individual investors to buy the loans of companies and countries. It became easier to own credit and receive the interest generated by them, and it also became easier to borrow money, be it an individual who wants to start a new business venture or a government looking to finance the development of its emerging economy. Highly liquid bond financing places the company managers and governments under greater scrutiny to perform, though, as investors can disinvest almost in an instant.

Finally, the democratisation of information points to one of the most spectacular events of the last decades, namely the rise of the internet. Although the television and the multi-channel cable or satellite technology increased considerably the amount of information that enters our

¹⁰ Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, pp. 45-46.

¹¹ Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, p. 51.

¹² It must be noted that an important exception to this trend was a period of “easy money” in the 1970’s, when lax credit controls in the west allowed African governments to borrow excessively. This contributed heavily to the present debt crisis in many African countries.

offices and our homes, the internet with its interactivity provides an uncontrolled platform for people everywhere to learn about the lives of people anywhere else. Information can no longer be controlled.

Behind these recent manifestations of globalisation, internationalisation has been developing over generations. Michael Mussa¹³ from the International Monetary Fund provides a broader picture of specifically global economic integration. He identifies three fundamental factors that affect this integration, namely improvements in the technology of transport and communication, the tastes of people and societies, and public policies. These factors have interacted to foster integration. The integration process may be traced along three historical dimensions, namely (1) human migration, (2) trade in goods and services and (3) movements of international capital and trade in services. In each of the dimensions some or all of the fundamental factors contributed to the historical integration.

Migration has been a basic dimension of human existence since earliest times – the initial driving force being the search for resources and territory. More recently migration acquired a stronger political dimension in the occurrence of mass migrations, as well as a stronger economic driving force in the event of individuals or families emigrating to obtain better opportunities. An example of this is the wave of immigrants from Europe to the New World during the 19th and early 20th centuries, which was aided by increasingly faster and cheaper means of transport.

Mussa's second dimension is trade, which is mainly affected by the existence – and the elimination – of trade barriers. Mussa distinguishes between natural and artificial trade barriers. Until the 18th centuries trade was done via land and sea – both hazardous ventures – but the invention of the steamship in the 19th century changed this dramatically. However, as these natural barriers were overcome, artificial barriers such as import taxation were raised as governments tried to protect domestic markets and generate revenue, while wars also arrested trade. The policies of isolationism and protectionism after the First World War and the depression of the 1930's restricted trade further, but the situation changed dramatically after the Second World War. Since then world trade has expanded six-fold, accompanied by a

¹³ Michael Mussa, "Factors Driving Global Economic Integration", *Global Economic Integration: Opportunities and Challenges* (symposium sponsored by the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, <http://www.kc.frb.org/Publicat/sympos/2000/sym00prg.htm>), 2000, p. 9-55.

three-fold increase in average living standards, as measured in real per capita GDP. A dramatic decrease in communication costs and vast improvements in transport technology also played a vital role in this. For Mussa the key factor in the further increase of trade in the future will be communication technologies, which has already seen revolutionary advances, as Friedman has illustrated.

Mussa's third dimension points to the forces of private markets and institutional investors who move their capital between securities and currencies in an effort to obtain the highest returns on investment. Friedman refers to the "electronic herd" of traders, shifting their capital in a headlong rush to wherever the grass seems greener.¹⁴ Mussa is more sensitive to the growing power of this private sector and the negative impact that it can have on economies. Governments find themselves increasingly at the mercy of international markets. He argues for the implementation of some measure of "discipline" in markets to ensure that investment decisions are more consistent and correspond effectively to the actual prospects of a venture or an economy¹⁵. Furthermore, the reduction in costs of information and communication technologies has enabled a large growth in financial services, with the added effect that, as mentioned, geographical location becomes less important. Public policy seems to have accommodated this development with the removal of restrictions in banking and financial sectors.

Mussa provides a broad picture of globalisation's economic dimension, which enables one to ask what this integration has meant for people's living conditions worldwide. Evidently, where integration has progressed smoothly, countries and their citizens have benefited greatly in terms of growth. In its absence, economic growth has faltered. The economist Paul Krugman argues that this failure is largely due to the failure to integrate because of domestic social or political problems, rather than blaming globalisation as somehow inherently unjust.¹⁶ One might argue, however, that the justice of any system that gives such enormous power into the hands of certain players, as globalisation does, may be questioned on the grounds of the effect of such systemic power, often unnoticed, on the human condition.¹⁷

¹⁴ Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, pp. 112-114.

¹⁵ Mussa, "Factors Driving Global Economic Integration", p. 32.

¹⁶ Paul Krugman, *The Accidental Theorist*, New York: WW Norton & Company, 1998, pp. 77-79.

¹⁷ A useful line of inquiry could be to follow the work of the French intellectual Michel Foucault (1926-1984), who wrote extensively on the interaction of knowledge and power in *The Will to Knowledge* (1976).

Krugman goes further to point out how Third World countries have benefited from globalisation by the “transfer of technology and capital from high-wage countries and the resulting growth of labor-intensive ... exports.”¹⁸ He argues that although wages are much lower (and certainly dismally low in comparison to developed countries), this is precisely why per capita intake in many developing countries could rise as it has. This was not as a result of benevolent policies or foreign aid, but the “indirect and unintended result of the actions of soulless multinationals and rapacious entrepreneurs, whose only concern was to take advantage of the profit opportunities offered by cheap labor.”¹⁹

Krugman’s point may be well taken: to take the business opportunities offered by globalisation away from developing countries because of poor working conditions will harm these economies more than do them good, because the “soulless multinationals” will simply take their business elsewhere. Protesting against this mechanism of globalisation in effect amounts to protest in favour of isolationism with its proven harmful effects. An alternative form of protest that might improve worker conditions without harming local economies would be for the consumers and shareholders of these multinationals to pressure them to provide better working conditions to Third World labourers.

Consumer and investor awareness does not eliminate the unease though, as this unease stems rather from the fact of widening income gaps. The perception exists that the “rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer”, as is often the argument of anti-globalists. The economist Bradford DeLong²⁰ writes an interesting article on this showing how 250 years ago the world was a very equal, albeit extremely poor place. Standards of living, low even when compared to that of the poorest countries today, were more or less the same worldwide. Over the past two centuries this picture has changed dramatically since the industrial revolution brought increasing wealth but also increasing inequality. Of course more than market forces were at play here, since exploitation of labour and of resources in colonies had placed many countries at a structural disadvantage. DeLong is quick to point out that the picture has improved dramatically since 1975 because of sustained growth in the economies of two countries, namely China and India, representing 2.5 billion people or over 40% of

¹⁸ Krugman, *The Accidental Theorist*, p. 81.

¹⁹ Krugman, *The Accidental Theorist*, pp. 83-84.

²⁰ J. Bradford DeLong, “The World’s Income Distribution: Turning the Corner?”, at http://econ161.berkeley.edu/TotW/world_income_dist.html, 2001.

world population. “The typical experience of a person in a poor developing country over the past two decades has been much better than the typical experience of a [developing] country, because the typical person lives in China or India.”²¹

But what can be done about those countries where globalisation has not brought its fruits? Jeffrey Sachs²² at Harvard University identifies two barriers which have prevented economic growth in poor countries, highlighting the fact that it is not first of all globalisation which have negatively impacted on these countries – globalisation actually had little effect by itself – but factors beyond globalisation’s reach. The first is such natural barriers as geographic location and diseases. Places that are too remote for easy access and trade, such as mountainous regions or landlocked countries are isolated from the globalizing forces. Diseases such a malaria and HIV/Aids also destroy economic growth and hinder foreign investment. The second factor points to artificial barriers such as national development strategies: protectionism, socialism and economic mismanagement that has proven disastrous over the past twenty years. Appropriate knowledge management is also essential: an investment in science and technology and in higher education is crucial for people to enter into the global economy. Sachs does however recommend that rich countries play a much more active role in reducing global inequalities:

“We need a new strategy for globalization that ensures that much more of the world will benefit from the expansion of world markets. The rich countries should help the poor countries to overcome the burdens of their geography by helping to fund a major fight against [such obstacles] as AIDS, malaria, and other tropical infectious diseases. The rich countries can do vastly more to assist the poor countries in becoming a part of the information-technology revolution. They should also help support scientists and universities in the poor countries that will be the key to finding technological solutions to the deepest challenges of disease, low agricultural productivity, and environmental degradation facing the poorest peoples of the world. Just tens of dollars per person per year would generate tens of billions of dollars of increased foreign assistance and make a profound difference in the quality of life, and in the benefits of globalization, for the world’s poorest people.”²³

Stanley Fischer from the IMF argues along similar lines, stressing that the choice is not to decide against or for globalisation, but “how to best take advantage of the opportunities presented by the growth and growing openness of the world economy. ... [P]romoting growth and reducing poverty are best achieved by embracing the global economy, improving policies

²¹ *Idem.*

²² Jeffrey Sachs, “Sorting out the Debate on Globalisation”, at http://www.project-syndicate.org/series/series_text_en.asp?id=335, 2000.

²³ *Idem.*

and strengthening institutions.”²⁴ He proposes two measures, namely trade liberalization (opening economies up to direct competition with international markets) and effective social spending (applying the economic benefits of globalisation to health services and education). To match these initiatives in developing countries, industrial countries ought to guarantee African exporters tariff-free access to their markets, increase economic aid, support peace processes and help fight the HIV/Aids pandemic, says Fischer.

Such proposals are clearly the type of piecemeal engineering that the philosopher Karl Popper would advise. It does seem like the most sensible way to go ahead, since any revolutionary action or large-scale reform is likely to have unforeseen and sometimes devastating consequences, especially system-wide revolutionary action as is often suggested with regards to capitalism. One difficulty with this is that piecemeal economic and social reform presupposes a consensus of the errors that must be eliminated, but given the complex nature of globalisation, such consensus is often lacking. This is particularly true in the conflict between capitalist institutions and anti-capitalist groups, and requires serious effort from all parties to search such consensus and to earnestly consider the alternative errors that opposing groups are identifying. The appropriate response from all sides will be to initiate dialogue rather than violent resistance or flagrant dismissal.²⁵

²⁴ Stanley Fischer, “The Challenge of Globalisation in Africa”, at <http://www.imf.org/external/np/speeches/2001/011901.htm>, 2001.

²⁵ Much of the discussion following the presentation of this paper at the conference focussed on the claim that the smooth economic integration of economies seems to initiate growth in those domestic markets. The following concerns were raised:

Firstly, it is argued that the liberalisation policies to which countries must conform in order to enter the global economy are designed and implemented without enough consideration of domestic economic, political social and geographical factors. Due to such factors country-specific research and unique liberalisation policies are often required in order to ensure economic growth. Where this is not done, the impression that globalisation is a programme or project driven by international bodies intensifies. This is especially the case when Thomas Friedman uses the metaphor of a “Golden Straightjacket” (referred to later in this paper) into which countries need to fit in order to join the global economy, which suggests how such uniform rules and standards are forced onto domestic markets irrespective of local conditions.

This is a contentious point as the IMF, for example, claims that their Poverty Reduction Strategy and other policies are country-specific. Similarities in macro-economic policy recommendations are nevertheless evident, for example the responsible management of domestic money and the maintenance of suitable exchange rates. These instances reflect international experience in a specific way, i.e. the opposite has clearly failed as successful or even viable alternatives. In that sense, the common elements of macroeconomic policies are uncontroversial. This does in no respect eliminate the need for country-specific research and policies. G.K. Helleiner, for instance, argues that developing countries must be afforded the opportunities and the resources to “exchange ideas and formulate their own agreed positions on international financial architecture ... wherever such agreement is possible, *prior* to entering into detailed discussion and negotiation with the more powerful actors who still are accustomed to setting the terms for international policy debate.” (G.K. Helleiner, *Markets, Politics and Globalization: Can the Global Economy be Civilized?*, 10th Raul Prebisch Lecture, Geneva: UNCTAD, 2000, p. 20.) Such interaction corresponds to the argument in the latter part of this paper that the

Environmental ethics has been one source of such alternative goals. The destruction of the environment seems to be the greatest threat that global economic growth poses – the mere thought of for instance the 2.5 billion people in China and India aiming for the living standards of the affluent societies of the west is enough to suggest the serious need for reformulated goals.

In the light of this discussion it could be useful to ask what the broader social and cultural impact of globalisation has been and could be. Which deeper ontological transformations might lie hidden behind the material manifestations of globalisation? How has it affected the identities of individuals and societies? It seems clear that countries can ill afford to erect walls between their domestic economy and the international markets, but does embracing the global economy also mean embracing a “global culture” at the expense of diverse local cultures?

exchange between global and local takes place in a dialectic fashion with effects at both ends and that it is not a one-way process.

Linda Weiss affirms the heterogeneity of the interaction between national economies and global economic forces by pointing out that national economies do not lose their regional and geographic characteristics in the face of an advancing globalisation, in contrast to the perception that globalisation diminishes state capabilities and erodes institutional diversity. Nation-states, she argues, “exhibit great adaptability and variety – both in their responses to change and in their capacity to mediate and manage international and domestic linkages.” (Linda Weiss, “Globalization and the Myth of the Powerless State”, *New Left Review* 225 (1997), p. 26.)

A second and closely related issue is the realisation that the costs to domestic economies of the implementation of liberalisation policies are often so great that it hampers subsequent growth. Dani Rodrik at Harvard University points out that “a typical developing country must spend \$150 million to implement requirements under just three WTO agreements ... [T]his sum equals a year’s development budget for many least-developed countries.” (Dani Rodrik, “Trading in Illusions”, *Foreign Policy*, at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/issue_marapr_2001/rodrick.html, March/April 2001, n.pag.)

These matters clearly have to be taken into consideration, but they also demonstrate once more that we do not need a systemic revolution of the integration process, but rather piecemeal efforts to curtail some of the errors that past efforts have indicated, in order to aim for what Helleiner calls a “civilised globalisation.”

Of a completely different level of criticism are those who question the very assumption that economic growth (as represented by per capita GDP) provides a measure of how well off and happy people are – thus, an assumption that regards economic growth as an end in itself. Jürgen Habermas calls this the form of life of private commodity owners and doubts whether it can be as convincingly legitimated today as it could in Hobbes’ time. He makes the rather provocative comment that “the ‘pursuit of happiness’ might one day mean something different – for example, not accumulating material objects of which one disposes privately, but bringing social relations in which mutuality predominates and satisfaction does not mean the triumph of one over the repressed needs of the other.” (Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, London: Heinemann, 1979, p. 199.) Such a shift in our form of life would of course happen gradually and over generations and is not something that can be planned and steered, as is the case with piecemeal engineering. Although it is important to ask such questions about the system, it remains a serious question how such criticism may be translated into action without severe upheaval, often detrimental to the living conditions of those already excluded from the benefits of globalisation.

4. Global Culture?

At various points in history intellectuals have put forward the idea of united humankind with emphasis on the peace that this could ensure. Such utopian ideals of a common global society and cosmopolitanism can be traced in the thought of Kant, Hume, Voltaire, Rousseau and more pronouncedly in that of Leibniz and Marx. Marx's version of a 'utopian globalism' could be regarded as the most practical, albeit unachievable, vision of such a society as it was formulated within his materialist conception of history. He idealised the time when all nations, "even the most barbarian", could be brought into "civilisation," while he has no place for nationalism, parochialism, religion and patriotism, exhibiting an "impatience with the particularity and narrowness of all 'local culture'."²⁶

His projections of transnational capitalism (which for him must be harnessed to most favour the workers and his humanistic ideals) are, according to Tomlinson, also marked with some ambivalence towards the cultural effects of such globalisation, especially in the way that it commodifies cultural production. One sees, therefore, in Marx's global vision a tension between his humanistic ideals and the implicit cultural imperialism that this may entail. A gulf opens between peace and homogenisation. This tension, argues Tomlinson, is characteristic of globalisation:

"Marx's position on a global culture ... exemplifies something of the ambiguity of the idea. Like nationalism, the idea of globality comes down to us today as 'Janus-faced'. On the one hand there are the manifest attractions of creating 'one-world' in the interests of peace, of concerted action on global environmental problems, of the recognition of our 'common humanity' and even, perhaps, of the emancipation from the cultural narrowness of the local that Marx desired. But on the other hand there is the fear of the 'homogenization' of culture and the suspicion that any sort of specification for a global culture is bound to reproduce one particular dominant version as *the* version of how life should be lived."²⁷

This sense of unease has had the result that various charges of 'cultural imperialism' are being directed against globalisation. Tomlinson identifies two such theses, to which three further variations may be added. The foremost of these is the claim that we are headed for a hegemonic, "global capitalist monoculture" where all cultures are subsumed into a culture of capitalism.²⁸ The argument is specifically aimed against the expansion of transnational corporations (often symbolized by such institutions as the World Bank, the IMF and other

²⁶ Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, pp. 75-77.

²⁷ Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, p. 77.

international economic bodies). They are supposedly to be held accountable for the convergence and standardisation of cultural goods that one notices wherever globalisation takes hold: the same billboards, food, shopping malls, cinema complexes, products and brands. It also refers to the process by which local culture is taken from its context and popularised for general consumption, often turning it into kitsch art. The international media plays a crucial role in propagating this global culture, competing to sell its own image and often funded by the big brands to advertise their products and to induce consumption.

A second critique of globalisation is the claim that it represents the “westernization of the world.”²⁹ The global culture that is spreading across the world is nothing other than the spread of a social and cultural totality that is directed from the ‘west’, its source, to the ‘rest’ of the world. These totalities include a European language (English), the ‘western’ consumer culture, styles, food, architecture, philosophical ideas and political ideologies, cultural values and social attitudes. Proponents of this view claim that the essence of the west is encapsulated in the assemblage of its institutions – technology, industrialisation, capitalist economy, urbanisation, ethics, religion, philosophy and so on – producing a cultural uniformity that drowns other cultures, and which is therefore ‘anti-cultural’ and ‘universalising.’

Three variations of these broad critiques could be identified. Closely related to the first scheme is the claim that global capitalist culture is a ‘constructed’ culture and therefore ahistorical, as opposed to the historical ‘rootedness’ of national cultures. Apart from the obvious charge that this leads to an impoverishment of culture and diversity, the claim is that this robs individuals of their identity. Individual identity, formerly built upon a communal or relational sense of national culture, is now exposed to some sort of ‘global non-identity’ with nothing that really binds human beings together. The result is then to react to this identity crisis by emphasising national and ethnic boundaries, thus reconstructing a strong sense of identity along ethnic and cultural lines. Heightened ethnic awareness could give way to differentiation and fragmentation, and finally result in conflict. It may very well be argued that many of the ethnic conflicts that we have witnessed over especially the past decade are partially due to this perception of identity loss.

²⁸ Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, pp. 81-88.

²⁹ Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, pp. 89-97, cf. pp. 63-64.

A second variation, closely related to the second critique against global culture above, is the claim that globalisation amounts to the expansion of modernity, specifically modernity conceived as an Enlightenment project of the west. Put differently, globalisation is regarded as the pinnacle of modernity, its necessary consequence. Some scholars classify this position as the “postmodern” critique of globalisation, tying it into the postmodern critique of modernity’s pretensions of high culture, its ‘grand narratives’ (the search for absolutes, universals and foundations in theory) and its key institutions (industrialism, urbanism, capitalism, the nation-state system, technology, etc.). Modernity thus conceived has failed in its utopian schemes of pacified cosmopolitanism and rational eradication of all problems in society as it would in physics. Globalisation, as the attempted realisation of these intended purposes must therefore also be discarded.

The final variation, closely related to the charge against modernity is the claim that globalisation is akin to universalism. This relates particularly to the universalising of local western values, which are then illegitimately projected onto non-westerners as the authoritative values for all cultures and peoples. “The universalism [that this position] objects to here is actually a case of the particular disguising itself – *masquerading* – as the universal.”³⁰ The result is that all cultural difference is replaced by a single set of universal values, and as such globalisation becomes, once again, imperialist and ‘anti-cultural.’

When reviewing these various critiques of the imperialism of global culture, one is struck by the vagueness surrounding the term ‘culture.’ The first step towards considering these objections would therefore be to clarify what is meant by culture in this regard.

Tomlinson identifies the key characteristic of culture as the attempt of human beings to make life meaningful on an existential level, as opposed to an instrumental level. ‘Existential’ for him does not necessarily refer to the ‘problem of existence’ as formulated in philosophy and religion, but rather refers to “matters that every human being routinely addresses in their everyday practices and experiences.”³¹ These meanings are then represented in symbols and referred to as cultural productions. This starting point gives Tomlinson a way to distinguish the cultural from the other dimensions of human life:

³⁰ In Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, p. 67.

“[C]ulture can be understood as the order of life in which human beings construct meaning through practices of symbolic representation. ... [This] allows us to make some useful distinctions. Very broadly, if we are talking about the economic we are concerned with practices by which humans produce, exchange and consume material goods; if we are discussing the political we mean practices by which power is concentrated, distributed and deployed in societies; and if we are talking culture, we mean the ways in which people make their lives, individually and collectively, meaningful by communicating with each other. ... Culture ... refers to all these mundane practices that directly contribute to people’s ongoing ‘life-narratives’: the stories by which we, chronically, interpret our existence in what Heidegger calls the ‘thrownness’ of the human situation.”³²

When viewing globalisation in the context of Tomlinson’s distinctions of the different dimensions of human life, it is striking to see how globalisation impacts on each and every of these dimensions – by producing symbolic meaning in each – thus making globalisation a truly complex matter.

Recalling his definition of globalisation as complex connectivity, Tomlinson emphasises the dimension of culture as not merely part of the multidimensionality of globalisation, but moreover as constitutive of complex connectivity. He argues that culture is consequential in that it constructs (existential) meaning, which informs human action. When we say that local action has global consequences, and such local action is informed by cultural symbolisation, culture may be said to be globally consequential. Therefore, in globalisation you not only have the phenomenon of the global integration of institutions, but also of the integration of individual and collective action into complex connectivity. This action impacts on the institutions, introducing the recursive and reflexive nature of human social activity to the way the institutions operate. Tomlinson refers to this as ‘institutional reflexivity’:

“Modern institutions are thus increasingly, like human beings, ‘learning entities’. It is this reflexive sensitivity of institutions in relation to [culturally informed] inputs from human agents that marks the peculiar dynamism of modern social life and that defines the connectivity between a multiplicity of small individual local actions and the highest-level global structures and processes. ... [T]he complexity of this chain of consequences simultaneously entails the political, economic and technological dimensions of globalization. But the point is that the ‘moment of the cultural’ is indispensable in interpreting complex connectivity.”³³

An important implication of the constitutive character of the cultural in complex connectivity is that globalisation is therefore not a one-way process where global institutions prescribe what local situations will look like, but an essentially *dialectical* process between the local and the global. Complex connectivity is not just a matter of distant forces that influence

³¹ Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, p. 19.

³² Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, pp. 18, 20.

³³ Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, p. 25, 26.

locally, but also of local actions that impact globally. Put differently: cultural connectivity ensures “at least the possibility of local intervention in global processes.”³⁴

Of course this dialectical character means that the converse of the argument is also true: globalisation has now become important for culture, because impacting locally it produces new existential symbolisation. The contrast with ‘normal’ cultural production is that these symbols were usually somehow bound to a particular physical territory, but now the cultural horizon has been expanded to the level of the global, expanding the life-world and the experience from which symbolic representations are to be produced. This amounts to what Tomlinson calls *detrterritorialization*, the realization that “complex connectivity weakens the ties of culture to place,”³⁵ which for him becomes the key cultural transformation that globalisation brings about.

Tomlinson’s definition of culture allows an evaluation of the cultural critiques of globalisation outlined at the start of this section. The claim that globalisation amounts to the “westernisation” of the world now becomes problematic. The argument separates the idea of the “West” from its geographical foundation by linking it to the key institutions of modernity. As such “westernisation” no longer convinces as the spread of western culture, but simply refers to the spread of modernity. The claim of westernisation is no different from the claim of modernization.

Globalisation was criticised as the pinnacle of modernity, the Enlightenment project of the west. Many of the grand pretensions of the 17th and 18th centuries have, however, been discarded and in its place remain, amongst others, rationality, the scientific worldview and various key institutions. Modernity, says Tomlinson, may be understood as a broad category that allows for “looser non-normative models of change, for indeterminacy, the critique of teleology and of Enlightenment rationality within it.”³⁶ That modernity has an inherently globalising drive seems clear from the way that modernity and its institutions displace existing worldviews and institutions, in the process integrating them into the modern world. The force behind this spread is the fact that modernity seems to offer more meaningful symbolic representations for the world we live in, especially in complex connectivity. This in

³⁴ Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, p. 26.

³⁵ Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, p. 29.

³⁶ Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, p. 46.

itself is not an anti-cultural or imperialist proposition. When similar existential questions to those posed in Europe or North America are asked in other parts of the world, it does not mean that these parts have now become westernised, since there is nothing essentially “western” about the symbolic representations of modernity. They may have had their origin in the west, but rather than spreading its control, the west is losing its grip on modernity as its own cultural invention. Other localities are giving their own answers to the questions posed by global modernity, continuing the dialectic between the global and the local. The claim that modernization leads to hegemonic global culture does not hold.

Related to the westernisation/modernisation argument was the claim that globalisation universalises western values, which are then projected onto non-western cultures. Tomlinson points out that this understanding of culture focuses on *difference* as its defining moment. This is why the universalisation of certain values, which then replace traditional values, are regarded as anti-cultural. However when culture is understood as the constitution of existential meaning, difference becomes not its essence or its *telos*, but simply its consequence, given that traditions develop in different local situations. “Cultural work may produce difference but this is not the same as saying that culture is founded in difference.”³⁷

The point is therefore that globalisation does lead to universalisation to some extent, but this does not amount to cultural imperialism. Rather, universalisation becomes an element in the cultural dimension of globalisation. It is important to understand the role that universality plays in complex connectivity: it is not the modernist project of the Enlightenment to replace the “slavery of the passions” with the “rule of reason”, but simply a descriptive reference to cultural connectivity. Zygmunt Bauman³⁸ makes a useful distinction in this regard between universality (the Enlightenment project) and globality: “Universality was a proud project, a Herculean mission to perform. Globality in contrast, is a meek acquiescence to what is happening ‘out there’.”

The earlier reference to Roland Robertson’s four players in the global field also attests to this: individuals and societies (or: the particular) interact with and relativise humankind and the system of societies (or: the universal), and vice versa. For him globalisation may generally be understood as this twofold process “involving *the interpenetration of the universalization of*

³⁷ Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, p. 68.

particularism and the particularization of universalism".³⁹ The reason why this becomes important in globalisation is because the integration or compression of the world in complex connectivity heightens this interpenetration. Particularism becomes emphasised as a universal, while universalism is more and more experienced as a concrete particular. Ironically, then, as Robertson remarks, opposition to globalisation (as supposedly homogenising) is simultaneously, albeit unintentionally, opposition to particularism, diversity and equality. He states this point as follows:

"[T]he particularization of universalism involves the idea of the universal being given global-human concreteness; while ... the universalization of particularism involves the extensive diffusion of the idea that there is virtually no limit to particularity, to uniqueness, to difference, and to otherness ... *Resistance* to contemporary globalization ... would thus be regarded as opposition not merely to the world as one, homogenized system but also – and, I believe, more relevantly – to the conception of the world as a series of culturally equal, relativized, entities or ways of life. The first aspect could well be regarded as a form of anti-modernity, while the second could fruitfully be seen as a form of anti-postmodernity."⁴⁰

Robertson highlights the complexity of the interaction between global and local, and elsewhere speaks of "glocality" to capture this interpenetration. This accentuates the fact that in the global-modern world our local lives are penetrated by distant events, relationships and forces, but being human beings, locally situated with a physical body, we continue to lead local lives. Globalisms are reinterpreted and inculturated into our circumstances, particularizing them and then returning them to the universal. This is what culture looks like in globalisation. Not a unitary global culture drowning local cultures, but a new complexity within culture. Tomlinson calls this *globalised culture*, with as its key characteristic that of deterritorialization:

"[T]here is little here to support the idea that a single, unified global culture in any conventional sense is about to emerge. ... However I do believe the style of cultural experience and identification is bound to be affected by the complex and multiform interrelations, penetrations and cultural mutations that characterize the globalization of our current stage of modernity. In the process, not merely different, more complex positions, but also different *modes* of cultural identification are arising. It is to these – the complex constituents of what we can call a deterritorialized, *globalized* culture – rather than to the monolithic imagining of a *global* culture, that we [must shift our attention]."⁴¹

This also applies to the nationalist argument that globalisation has erased the boundaries by which individuals define their identity. To say that globalisation is a constructed and

³⁸ Bauman, in Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, p. 95.

³⁹ Robertson, *Globalization*, p. 100.

⁴⁰ Robertson, *Globalization*, p. 102.

⁴¹ Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, p. 105.

therefore ahistorical culture does not make sense from this point of view, because globalised culture is no less particular, historical and time-bound than national culture. It does of course differ in the sense that the horizon of identification has become the global – which does not necessarily inhibit identity formation. Rather it represents, as Tomlinson argues above, a different mode of cultural identification. Neither does globalised culture prohibit identification along ethnic, geographical and national boundaries – it is not uncommon to identify oneself as simultaneously Xhosa, South African, African and cosmopolitan in “concentric circles of belonging and identity”⁴² – which becomes one more feature of complex connectivity.

Globalised culture is therefore no more constructed than national culture; in fact, it opens up more ways in which we may construct our identities the better to prepare and adapt to the challenges of living in a globalised world. Foremost of these is the ability to deal with cultural differences and pluralism, rather than retreating into narrowly defined ethnic identification with its resultant fragmentation and conflict. The perceived identity loss referred to in this regard could be seen as the inability of some to access the global as a new horizon and mode of identification, rather than being due to globalisation’s homogenisation of culture. Retreating into singular cultural identities is, therefore, precisely to resist contemporary globalisation in Robertson’s double sense. Globalisation could herald a new cosmopolitanism with greater understanding and peace between the people of the world.

In this way much of the criticism that anti-globalists voice, including the argument that we’re headed for a global capitalist monoculture is set aside. However, some rather pragmatic concerns remain. The first is the effect of power on the exchange between local and global. When global forces become so dominant that they can condition the spread of globalisation’s benefits to certain requirements, the process becomes unbalanced. Fischer’s comments on the role of international financial institutions portray something of this power imbalance: “[only] countries that elected to play by the rules of the international system, would be helped.”⁴³ Friedman⁴⁴ refers to this, somewhat blatantly, as the “Golden Straightjacket”, a list of rules to which countries must abide in order to take part in the global economy, which he describes as a “pretty much ‘one size fits all’” stricture. That such rules or guidelines of sensible economic

⁴² Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, p. 102.

⁴³ Fischer, “The Challenge of Globalisation in Africa”, n.pag.

⁴⁴ Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, p. 105.

policy exist is not disputed, but certainly it must be “fitted” in a dialectic process of inculturation in every local situation. This is something to which economic policy must give serious consideration.

A second concern relates to the commodification of cultural products, transforming them into functional products (linked to a monetary equivalent), but in the process taking away their existential value. Now “packaged culture” may be bought in the form of branded clothing, vehicles, food, tourist destinations and movies, but all these products are devoid of cultural meaning in the sense that it becomes superfluous ‘surface culture,’ no longer providing existential meaning to those who use it. In this sense at least one does find a homogenisation of cultural experience, because the recipe looks the same everywhere – or at least, in every globalised/consumerised space. One still, at least for now, need only tread off the central business district of any large city into the back streets and you’ll see less of the well-known brand names and shopping malls and more particular forms of production. Furthermore, to equate consumerism to monoculturalism would be to reduce culture to its material goods, which it is not. Local culture has diverse means of dealing with globalised culture, even when incorporating consumer values into their local life-world. Still, the balance of this dialectic may only gain from critical observation of this trend in future rather than letting it run freely.

A final concern is the degradation of the environment. The Earth cannot keep supporting the rate of consumption and waste production of, for example, Northern American society. When promoting growth, this must be one of the first issues that economic policy considers. What good does it have to give people a better life now, when it is to the detriment of the quality and health of their children’s lives? Current conceptions of economic growth often does not value the negative impact that this has on the environment enough, and this matter needs a lot more attention in mainstream economic practice and government policy.

These concerns, though serious, do not amount to arguments against globalisation per se. They are rather instances of piecemeal efforts to fend off some of the negative impacts that global economic, political and cultural practices could have. Such efforts are surely possible within globalisation, happening in no way different than the dialectic between the global and the local, the universal and the particular.

5. Tradition and Ethnicity

Culture, therefore, is not displaced by globalisation, but is rather given different modes in which it may function. However, if culture is changed in this way, does it not at least result in the loss of tradition? Modernisation seems to disrupt traditional values, practices and institutions and replace them with its own. The traditional and the ethnic are replaced by the modern.

The Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye takes up this matter in *Tradition and Modernity* and from the outset he disputes this bipolar view of the two notions. For him the dualism is based on a view of tradition as “rural, agrarian, prescientific, resistant to change and innovation, and bound by the perception of the past”, while modernity is depicted as its opposite: “scientific, innovative, future oriented, culturally dynamic, and industrial and urbanized.”⁴⁵ Tomlinson points out that this dualism reveals a tendency to see modernity as the “cultural property of the West, and tradition as the defining cultural deficit of the ‘rest’.”⁴⁶ To think in terms of dualisms inhibits the complexities of interconnectedness, since they are linear and static. Both Tomlinson and Gyekye prefer, therefore, to speak of ‘modernities,’ which allows for notions of non-western modernity. Furthermore, tradition does not refer to absolute changelessness. Although it does refer to inheritance from previous generations, there is always an ongoing process of integrating some values or practices and discarding others.

The tradition–modernity dualism is thus based on a number of questionable assumptions that homogenises groups and individuals into either the one or the other. What, then, is tradition and how does it differ from culture? From the etymology of the Latin *traditum* it is clear that the reference is to the past. Gyekye⁴⁷ explains it as follows: any one generation employs a set of cultural products (what he calls ‘cultural values’), which (to follow Tomlinson) constitute existential meaning. When such cultural values have been transmitted over two successive generations, it becomes tradition. If, for argument’s sake, the first generation creates a new set of ten values, this is not yet tradition, but it is culture. The second generation may choose

⁴⁵ Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 217.

⁴⁶ Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, p. 64.

⁴⁷ Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 219-221.

to discard some of the values in the set – which is still not tradition. It is only when the third generation takes over a number of the original cultural values that these may be said to represent a tradition. Here, finally, culture and tradition converge. Along the line, however, new values may be created or assimilated from other traditions. Before these cultural values have been transmitted over three generations, however, they stand alongside the traditional values, and only after three generations becomes part of the tradition.

The retaining or discarding of cultural products suggest that present generations take a critical stance toward the traditional values, not simply because they are traditional, but to revitalise the tradition where it no longer constitutes meaningful existence or where it has become detrimental to people's functioning in the contemporary world. Such refinement may be induced internally by creating new cultural products, or externally by assimilating appropriate alien cultural values (which Gyekye calls "cultural exchange"). There is a range of grounds for criticism of traditions: dysfunctionality, incoherence, or the adoption of new ethical, metaphysical and anthropological foundations.⁴⁸ All these boil down to the same question: does the set of traditional values transmitted from previous generations constitute relevant and viable existential meaning in the locally situated lives of the people who employ them? Does it offer the possibility of meaningful existence in the present world?

The refinement may take longer in some traditions than in others depending on the adaptive capacity of its members, but it occurs nevertheless. If traditions do not change, they become stagnant and dysfunctional. On the other hand, where they adopt foreign values too quickly or without proper assimilation and inculturation, two separate and conflicting cultural milieus – the traditional and the new – exist side-by-side without integration into a coherent scheme. Similarly, where foreign cultural products have been forced or foisted upon a tradition, the same harmful effects could occur. The precarious nature of this process is demonstrated by the confusion and fragmentation that such situations may evoke.

To think of modernity and tradition as two poles is therefore simplistic. In fact, modernity is itself a tradition. It originated in Europe by combining some traditional elements with some completely new cultural products that offered a better symbolisation of life after the Enlightenment. Since then, it has been adapting and revitalizing itself, in the process

⁴⁸ Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 222-223.

criticising itself (e.g. the so-called postmodern critique of modernity) and changing. When modernity and another tradition comes into contact, as is often the case in complex connectivity, one can expect a certain degree of cultural exchange between them. Modernity involves everyone who is affected by globalisation by changing the material and social conditions in which people live. When living conditions change, cultural change follows, since there are new realities that demand new answers to life's questions and even pose some altogether new questions. The modern tradition, having been formulated over many generations to deal with the existential demands of modern life, will certainly provide many preliminary answers to the new situation. But as with any cultural exchange there will be an element of inculturation and interpenetration between the modern and the local tradition.

Tomlinson follows Néstor García Canclini in calling this type of exchange *hybridisation*, remarking that the hybrid experience is increasingly the global experience. Hybridisation basically means mixing: "the mingling of cultures from different territorial locations brought about by the increasing traffic amongst cultures ... that global modernity produces".⁴⁹ There are two ways to view this process: the 'hybridity versus purity' position, which claims that the combination of the two are a hybrid, syncretised pseudo-species of the two original and pure forms; and the 'hybridity all the way down' position, which understands hybridisation as the ongoing condition of all human cultures, with no zones of purity.⁵⁰ Following Gyekye's definition of tradition the purity myth seems the wrong position, so hybridisation must here be understood in terms of the second position. This highlights the fluidity of tradition, especially in complex connectivity, which nevertheless remains bound to a specific time, historical persons and physical locations that ensure that tradition, as culture, is never severed from its localities.⁵¹

It follows that in the process of revitalisation, traditions are generally not evaluated as a whole. Rather, positive and negative features of the tradition are considered critically.

⁴⁹ Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, p. 142.

⁵⁰ Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, p. 143-145.

⁵¹ In the light of this it might be argued that globalisation puts traditions in such a perpetual state of flux that traditions can no longer be separated from one another, but rather becomes part of a cultural *mélange* and intermingling of identities. Where this is the case, tradition does seem to have been displaced by some form of globalised popular culture – "different ... in character from the integrating, 'essentializing' nature of national cultures, looser-textured, more protean and relatively indifferent to the maintenance of sharp discriminations of cultural origin and belonging" (Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, p. 147.) On the other hand, this is once again probably true of only those highly globalised spaces in city capitals and border crossings, and outside

Gyekye demonstrates what such a re-evaluation in African (and specifically Akan) culture may look like.⁵² Negative features include African culture's attitude towards science, which portrays no or few instances of sustained probing, nor of pursuing scientific knowledge for its own sake. Technology, serving as a purely practical matter – with uncritical application and little attempt at understanding or improving the technology – is related to this. Thirdly African culture has for Gyekye certain negative social and moral features, such as its communitarian inheritance patterns and patronage practices. Fierce ethnic loyalties serve to justify inhumane acts against persons from other ethnic groups, and there is a general apathy toward public service. A fourth negative feature is African people's "unnecessarily excessive and incessant attention to their ancestors" and superstitious practices related to this. These negative features could be ameliorated through comparison with modernity's answers to such issues. For example, educational and training programmes in science and technology, together with a substitution of the negative factors related to extreme communitarianism with a stronger focus on individual responsibility and equality could obtain from a dialogue with modernity.

Gyekye's cautious treatment of communitarianism emanates from the fact that he regards certain of the communitarian values in African culture as precisely its positive features. These are Africa's relationalism with its humanist and social – rather than individualist – conception of morality. However, individualism is not to be abandoned, because both the individual and the community are to receive moral consideration and standing. Therefore, processes such as urbanisation, industrialisation and "technologisation" must be analysed not only on account of their impact on the community as much as on the individual. Gyekye calls this position "moderate communitarianism" in contrast to normative communitarianism that gives precedence to the community over the individual. Moderate communitarianism is rather descriptive of the fact that healthy individual action implies a supportive community while the individual remains normative in her decisions. Humanism becomes the key feature here, and this could be Africa's contribution to its own African modernity. Gyekye mentions other positive African cultural features linked to this, such as the normativity of economic practices and ownership, the importance of kinship and family values, Africa's "communal

these spaces one may expect a stronger hegemony of traditional cultural products. Where cultural mixing will lead, though, remains an open question at this stage.

⁵² Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 242-260, 287-297.

democracy” of limited government and civic responsibility to local (and thus decentralized) leadership, and what he calls Africa’s practical wisdom.

This brief description certainly does not give proper account of Gyekye’s stimulating discussion of an ‘African modernity,’ but is intended to demonstrate how the process of dialectical change within and between traditions may occur. In such a process it is not only the one tradition, for instance the African, that is transformed, but also the modern tradition, which may be influenced to take on some of the humanist features of African culture.

In concluding this section it is fitting to ask how ethnicity fits into the analysis? Ethnicity is often considered alongside tradition since it also invokes the sense of some set of cultural values, practices and features that sets a boundary by which a group of people identify themselves with one another. The concept does however have a more contentious connotation than tradition because of the many conflicts and wars that ethnic divisions have produced; some reference has been made to this as a result of resisting globalisation, but the political motivations behind many of these present-day conflicts should not be discounted.

Ethnicity is not only contentious in a material sense, but also ambiguous in an analytic sense. The political analyst Rotimi Suberu from Nigeria offers some conceptual clarification by distinguishing between three related terms, namely ethnic group, ethnic pluralism and ethnicity.⁵³ An “ethnic group” refers to a social collectivity whose members may share a group name, territory, language, religion and importantly, some sense of common ancestry and heritage. (It may be noted that Max Weber defines ethnic groups solely in terms of belief in common origins and not in any other cultural or racial features.⁵⁴) “Ethnic pluralism” describes contact or interaction between two or more ethnic groups. Finally, “ethnicity” is the condition where distinctions of otherness and identity arise in the light of such pluralism. It refers to “the mobilization and politicization of ethnic-group identity in situations of competitive or conflictual pluralism.” Suberu proceeds to distinguish three ways in which ethnicity have been managed in Africa, namely (1) hegemonic repression (typically the repression found under totalitarian leaders and governments with strong ethnic ties), (2) hegemonic exchange (where government is elected proportionately to the country’s ethnic

⁵³ Rotimi Suberu, “Governance and the Ethnic Factor”, in Goran Hyden *et al*, eds., *African Perspectives on Governance*, Asmara: Africa World Press, 2000, pp. 124-125.

distribution) and (3) – his preferred strategy – polyarchical or non-hegemonic exchange (the liberal democratic constitutional framework, with full representation, rule of law and often special provisions for minority ethnic groups), to which he also refers as multiculturalism.⁵⁵

Amongst these three positions, the third seems to incorporate the idea of cultural exchange described by Tomlinson and Gyekye most clearly. It supposes a relatively open or porous relationship between different ethnic groups, allowing for the type of interpenetrating dialectic they propose. Where ethnicity becomes politicised as rivalling interest groups that lobby for certain privileges and resources, the exchange is no longer open and free, and the dialectical balance disturbed. Gyekye goes as far as proposing that ethnicity must be rejected as a political and social value to ensure that it doesn't lead to such exploitation.⁵⁶ He goes even further to dispute the notion of primordial identification or common ancestry, referring to the "invention of ethnicity." Defining ethnicity in these terms, he says, are "incorrect, for its essential element, common ancestry, is itself not coherent, well-defined, or historically transparent."⁵⁷ Gyekye's argument is that an individual's genealogy is simply too complex – given the realities of human movement and ethnic intermingling – to trace it to any specific ancestor, so that kinship and ancestry becomes as arbitrary a choice (that is, not historically or biologically pre-determined) as communal goals, values and sentiments shared by members of the same group. Given the wide array of ethnic groups represented in one's genealogy, no one can claim a singular ethnic identity on this basis. One can, however claim a *cultural* identity, and this is what Gyekye proposes instead of 'ethnic' identity. He says that this fact

"whittles away the whole basis of ethnic identity: it may well lead us to consider ethnicity as an invention, constructed out of not-well-founded beliefs and assumptions that members of an 'ethnic' group are related by kinship ties. There is no doubt that ethnicity, defined in terms solely and essentially of common ancestry, has no firm foundation in historical or genealogical reality. ... [A communal] group will, thus, not be an 'ethnic' group – a group standardly defined by common descent or biological ties. But, even so, the members of the group will come to share – and be bound by – common goals, values, and practices, a common language, a sense of history and of solidarity ... [and] a collective name. ... [Yet] what would have emerged, surely, is a cultural, not particularly an ethnic, group. It seems, therefore, that what we have is more appropriately a concept of cultural community than a concept of ethnicity."⁵⁸

⁵⁴ E. Ike Udogu, "Ethnicity and democracy in sub-Saharan Africa", in *Preparing Africa for the Twenty-First Century*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999, p. 153.

⁵⁵ Suberu, "Governance and the Ethnic Factor", pp. 133-138.

⁵⁶ Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, p. 88.

⁵⁷ Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, p. 96.

This argument is persuasive. If ethnicity has no essential factor that distinguishes it from culture and tradition, we ought to ask why it is still used other than for political mobilisation and exploitation? “Managing ethnicity” in Suberu’s sense need not mean anything different than “managing group interests.” Between the terms culture and tradition there is enough on which individuals may base their identity and group association, without fostering unchanging local ties that inhibit the dialectic interaction of complex connectivity.

6. Conclusion

The title of this paper suggests two metaphors by which we may choose to describe globalisation. The first is the Tower of Babel. Genesis 11 describes humanity’s early attempt to build a city with a tower that would reach into the heavens, not only symbolic of their power and characteristic of their arrogance, but also representing their ideal to become a single people. Globalisation could be seen as humanity’s second attempt to realize this dream of power and singular organisation, this time building a city that would encompass the whole earth.

Globalisation as Babel is a detestable project on social and ethical grounds, and may be seen as the ultimate realisation of Enlightenment modernity’s opportunistic idealisms. It centralises capital, power and structures, often at the expense of the human dignity of labourers and others on the periphery of the structure. If this is how we view globalisation, it becomes understandable – and morally obligatory – to fight such arrogance, even if this means running amok in the streets of the cities where the central architects of this superstructure come together to plot their triumph.

But antiquity provides us with an alternative metaphor, namely the Piraeus, the famous Athenian harbour and centre of its commerce and naval policy. During the fifth century BC, the young democracy of Athens reached outward by building the Long Walls between the city and the Piraeus. From there it would have free access across the seas to distant lands for trade and cultural exchange. This initiative set Athens apart from the other city-states such as Sparta with its military tribalism, and roused the contempt of many anti-democrats and oligarchs. The Piraeus symbolised what Karl Popper calls the *open society*. The open society

⁵⁸ Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 100-101.

is characterized by its emphasis on rational reflection and personal responsibility, while the closed society resembles for Popper “a herd or a tribe in being a semi-organic unit whose members are held together by semi-biological ties – kinship, living together, sharing common efforts, common dangers, common joys and common distress.”⁵⁹ Against this organic organisation the open society has an “abstract” notion, almost completely losing its group character. Although the human element of relationality will never prohibit real human contact to disappear completely, relationality is no longer a structural component of the open society, which prohibits exploitation on grounds of kinship or other ties. Abstractness enables equality and justice, emphasising each member’s individual and equal responsibility for their actions.

Could we conceive of globalisation as the Piraeus of the modern era – the interconnecting of distant spaces and the opening up of societies? The Long Walls could become the symbol of those societies that open themselves up to the trade and the dialectic of globalisation. The abstractness of the open society of globalisation is its ability to connect people and bodies (with no biological or organic ties whatsoever) simply through contingencies such as their professional or personal capacity and position. The only binding feature is their human dignity, which is ultimately universal, excluding nobody.

The analysis given in this paper suggests that the second metaphor is the more appropriate one. Complex connectivity does not pretend to build a single, unified global structure that wants to exclude all otherness. It is rather the port that allows for life in both the global and the local at the same time. Dealing with the implications of this life is, to borrow the phrase of Albert Camus,⁶⁰ a human matter to be settled among human beings.

Tomlinson makes an interesting suggestion in this regard, arguing that complex connectivity grants humanity the opportunity to retrieve a “non-elitist, non-ethnocentric, non-patriarchal and non-‘globalist’” cosmopolitanism. This, he says, requires a dialectic identity and cultural disposition between two sensibilities. On the one hand it requires an “active sense of belonging to the wider world.” Such a ‘global identity’ is one that embraces all of humanity and the global horizon that complex connectivity makes available as a new mode of identification,

⁵⁹ K. R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies, I. The Spell of Plato*, rev. ed. 1962, London: Routledge, 1966, p. 173.

⁶⁰ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1955, p.98.

rather than being bound and defined solely by the local. This is a sense of grasping the “globalized world as one in which ‘there are no others.’” But on the other hand is an almost opposing sensibility of diversity and pluralism, “an awareness of the world as one of *many* cultural others.” This requires a reflexivity to also view one’s own culture as one of many others, but without resorting to relativism. Individual responsibility for human action can never be renounced. Between these two positions lie the possibility of a global cosmopolitanism where, to recall Robertson, the global and the local become mutually interpenetrating. The same dialectic that we saw occurring in culture and in tradition therefore exists also on an individual level, fostering a sense of global personal identity. This requires “an *ongoing dialogue* both within ourselves and with distanced cultural others.”⁶¹

If we are wrong and globalisation is Babel disguised as the Piraeus, then we are very wrong indeed, and our fate may well resemble that of our unhappy ancestors. However, if globalisation offers us the opportunity to build the Long Walls between our local cities and the port that will connect us with globality and its different modes of thinking about the world, then this is an opportunity to be harnessed with care and earnest.

⁶¹ Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, p. 195.

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Between Freedom and Culture

Alain Finkielkraut's critique of multiculturalism

Abstract:

Multiculturalism has become a widely used term to describe the plurality of human society. This paper places multiculturalism within its social and cultural contexts. This contextualisation raises the following problem: do human beings construct their social and cultural identity by free choice or is their identity bestowed on them externally? This essay argues for the former position by examining the work of the French philosopher Alain Finkielkraut. Though Finkielkraut is critical about multiculturalism he seems to revert in more recent work to the opposite position in the debate on the individual's position in society. The reasons for Finkielkraut's turn is postulated as the result of a too rigid separation and resultant collapse of the poles of universalism and particularism in contrast to a more tenable view of what may be called the dialectic or interpenetration of the universal and the particular.

Opsomming:

Multikulturalisme het 'n populêre term geword om die pluraliteit van die mensdom aan te dui. Hierdie opstel plaas multikulturalisme binne sosiale en kulturele konteks deur die volgende vraag te opper: Konstrueer mense hul sosiale en kulturele identiteit deur middel van vrye keuse, of word hul identiteit van buite af op hulle oorgedra? Die opstel argumenteer ten gunste van die eersgenoemde posisie deur die werk van die Franse filosoof Alain Finkielkraut in te span. Hoewel Finkielkraut dus krities is van multikulturalisme in die tweede sin hierbo, blyk dit tog asof hy in meer resente werk homself toewend na 'n outoritêre opvatting oor kultuur en die individu se posisie daarbinne. Die rede vir hierdie omkering in Finkielkraut se denke word toegeskryf aan 'n te rigiede onderskeid tussen, en gevolglike ineenstorting van, die pole van universalisme en partikularisme, in teenstelling met 'n meer genuanseerde siening van die dialektiek en interpenetrasie van die universele en die partikuliere.

Preface

Some time ago I attended a conference on ethnicity in Central Africa. One evening we were sitting around in a group entertaining one another with traditional dancing and singing. A few drums were handed around and I was happy to get hold of my own little drum to beat on. One of the delegates, eager to hear some African drumming, approached those of us who were holding drums excitedly. In passing me he made a comment to the effect that I should rather not drum along with the others, as I was likely to spoil the rhythm. His intended impartial aside evoked in me a completely disproportionate indignation, behind which lay two factors: firstly, he was a black person from Uganda who's seemingly harmless comment to a white South African implied (from my perspective) that since I'm not black, I cannot play the drum like an African. With this dismissal he used the bondage of my cultural attributes to deny me the possibility to prove my dexterity with the drum, so denying my human dignity and autonomy.

I decided to keep my drum and play along (opting therefore to retain my dignity and not give in to the pressure of the colour of my skin), in the process making a complete hash of the drumming and, as he predicted, spoiling the rhythm of our beating. My cultural clothing took their revenge on my pride and bound me back to my drum-less roots. I was caught between freedom and culture.

1. Introduction

The problem of multiculturalism here refers to the question: are human beings first and foremost autonomous individuals free to decide which cultural attributes they wish to assign to themselves, or does their rootedness in a specific culture, language, geography and collectivity take precedence over their autonomy as free individuals? I.e., does our culture *bind* us to itself from which we either struggle (in vain) to become free of, or to which we adhere (often taking certain measures to defend it, be they violent or benign)? Or do we, alternatively, *choose* to either bind ourselves to our culture, or to take a critical distance from our culture (in order to separate those characteristics that we consider negative from those we consider positive, and consequently choose to 'clothe' ourselves in the latter and to discard the former)? In what is generally referred to as multiculturalism today, it seems that we are opting to consider people as primarily bound to their culture, and only secondarily free and

autonomous to choose, but only after our primary bond – i.e. without ever being able to discard our cultural dress. In political philosophy this debate is carried under the labels of individualism versus collectivism.

These positions may also be distinguished as those of universalism and particularism. On the one hand, human beings all share the same universal principle of freedom, making all humans *equal* to one another on a basic, primary level. On the other hand human beings are determined by particular circumstances that differ from one person to the other as they differ from one ethnic, political, cultural and social group to the other, making every person uniquely *different* from any other. In our “multicultural world” both these values, equality and difference, are upheld as two basic claims that we share with others. Herein lies the contradictory position of multiculturalism: how are we simultaneously equal to one another (which requires that we recognise each person as a human being worthy of respect and dignity) and different from each other (which implies that we discriminate between more and less meaningful human traits). Both principles claim precedence as antagonists who do not wish to share the stage. Yet, this is precisely what multiculturalism sets out to do. On the one hand, it wants to remain faithful to the Enlightenment ideals of universal values that belong to all of humanity and to which no single group has privileged access, either on the basis of some notion of progress and superiority, or as a result of any particular ethnic or cultural determinations. On the other hand, multiculturalism wants to defend minority groups in a world characterised by pluralism, to guarantee the right of different groups to maintain their own values as meaningful and valid (De Wit 1996: 11). Joppke and Lukes (1999: 6) sees this not merely as a paradox, but a contradiction, stating that “multiculturalism’s epistemological relativism is self-defeating, because a context transcending, universal claim is made about the reducibility of meaning and truth to their social and political contexts.” This might be overstating that case since fallibility in epistemology does not preclude truth, but the point remains that multiculturalists try to deal with two opposing concerns.

The French philosopher Alain Finkielkraut offers an illuminating overview of culture and political thinking since the Enlightenment. He takes the universalistic position and considers human beings as primarily free and autonomous, capable of determining rationally their social position and form of life. Finkielkraut places himself in continuation with the Enlightenment ideal, which he contrasts with Romanticism, the opposite conception that a person’s destiny lies not in her own hands, but in that of history, or religion, or culture, or

some other idol. However, a leaning towards particularism has emerged in some of Finkielkraut's more recent work, which heightens the interest in the analysis of his work as it highlights the ambiguity of the distinction between freedom and culture. This paper attempts to offer such a discussion by focusing on three of Finkielkraut's essays, namely (in chronological order of the initial French editions): *The Wisdom of Love* (1997, French edition 1984), *The Defeat of the Mind* (1995, French edition 1987), and *In the Name of Humanity* (2000, French edition 1996).

These works will be discussed more or less chronologically, highlighting themes that demonstrate the tension between culture and freedom. Finally, Finkielkraut's own position on multiculturalism and his eventual paradoxical retreat into particularism is discussed. The conclusion offers a brief attempt at formulating the difficult task of multiculturalism by considering an alternative approach to the relationship between the universal and the particular.

2. Ethics before culture

"At the very moment the Other got his culture back, he lost his freedom: his personal name disappeared into the name of the community; he became an example, nothing more than an interchangeable representative of a particular class of beings. While receiving an unconditional welcome, the Other found he no longer had any freedom of movement, any means of escape. All originality was taken away from him; he was trapped insidiously in his difference" (Finkielkraut 1995: 75).

"If men are first and foremost men and only afterward members of a caste or aristocratic lineage, then they no longer belong to what they belong. When man cannot be reduced to his rank, position, community, nation, ethnicity, or lineage, this is freedom. And that is why there is something undesirable about freedom. ... With freedom, everyone becomes accountable for his destiny" (2000: 26).

"The alternative, then, is very simple: either people have rights or they have uniforms; either they can legitimately free themselves from oppression, even (and especially) if their ancestors had already been subjugated and were bearing the burden, or else their culture has the last word" (1995: 104-105).

For Finkielkraut the drama of the West since the Enlightenment has been the conflict between those who saw man in the singular and those who saw man in the plural. His work repeatedly tells of the devastating effects where the latter has won out – a victory that was sealed in the nineteenth century, the catastrophic results to which the twentieth century has played witness: World War I, the rise of National Socialism in Germany and Stalinist Communism, and colonisation (to which Apartheid may be added) to name a few.

However, in his earlier work, *The Wisdom of Love*, Finkelkraut does not offer an explicit account of these historical developments (as he does in later works), but rather gives a philosophical justification of the universalist position by employing Emmanuel Levinas' ethics of responsibility and theory of the Other. The relationship with the Other is for Levinas first and foremost an ethical relationship. Levinas says, when I am confronted with the otherness of the Other, my self-enclosing security is opened up towards a claim that the Other makes on me. The claim comes to me via the face of the Other, and it claims my responsibility for the Other prior to any decision from my part to take on that responsibility. "The Good comes to me from without, the ethical falls from above, and it is in spite of myself that 'my own being turns into being for another'" (1997: 15). I can only decide to re-act on the responsibility already laid on me, either doing good by taking up the responsibility and keeping the Other's difference open as an infinite otherness, or doing evil by fetishising and fixing the Other's difference in a stable essence, blocking off the gaze of the Other by clothing it in a "uniform."

To clothe the Other is to cover the face in an attempt to free myself from the claim it lays on me. The confrontation with the face of the Other reveals in the Other a surplus and an otherness that escapes my mind's grasp. This means that I cannot configure the other person as merely possessing a set of unique characteristics, but that there is infinitely more to the Other which makes her a human being and this infinity cannot be rationally circumscribed or enclosed.¹ What the face reveals, says Levinas, is being and truth, but it simultaneously masks this truth in its infinite alterity, escaping my grasp and as a result, taking away my freedom. I am no longer situated in a self-enclosed world where I freely determine the meaning of entities, but am confronted and bound by the revelation of another who does not fit into my rational categories but who makes a claim on my responsibility. Levinas goes as far as calling the bondedness "suffering" that I must endure.

However, there is a way out of this bondedness: the assigning of difference to the Other, "the process of confusing one's neighbour with his attributes." Finkelkraut emphasises that cultural difference must be "ceaselessly defended against ethnocentric arrogance," but the

¹ In *The Human Condition* Hannah Arendt (1958: 179) makes a similar distinction between the "what" of somebody – their physical identity, qualities, gifts, talents and shortcomings – and the "who" of someone, their unique personal identities as whom they make their appearance in the human world.

danger of such multiculturalism is that it may become an attempt to change the Other into an object of knowledge, possible to grasp in a word. The attempt to label the Other is often not an indication of respect for diversity and plurality, but an attempt to escape the claim that the Other sets on you. “The Other is not set free by granting him a unique, even prestigious essence: this frees you, not him” (1997: 19). To keep open the ethical relationship is to respond to the claim and take on the responsibility for the Other, thereby acknowledging the infinite alterity of the Other.

Such is the “wisdom of love”: love denounces the idyllic world of fusion with the beloved – actually, “the sweetness of a world without the Other” (1997: 43). Finkelkraut portrays the ethical relationship as the relationship between a lover and his beloved. The lover loves the beloved not because of some alluring characteristics or for the beloved’s beauty, but because of who the beloved is – that elusiveness that binds the lover to the beloved face that cannot be known. “Love lacks the knowledge of the Other, but knowledge lacks its alterity” (1997: 29). It fruitlessly seeks to grasp the enigma of the Other, which is something completely different than the colour of her eyes or the shape of her body.

“The ‘you’ of ‘I love you’ is never precisely my equal or my contemporary, and ‘love’ is the frantic investigation of this anachronism. ... Love is that paradoxical bond that, as it deepens, strips the Other of every determination until she becomes impenetrable. As long as I was not in love with her, she was beautiful or ugly, nervous or calm, obsessive or hysterical: but none of these attributes can possibly sum her up now. I chose her for her qualities that were wonderful, special, or unique; what I love about her now is not ‘a quality different from all others, but ... the very quality of difference’” (1997:37-38).

Love’s wisdom is to give in to this bond and this suffering and not to envisage a communion and unity with the beloved that wipes away the quality of difference. Love is “duality that fails to transform itself into unity” (1997: 50). It is a “summons back to the Other” where, despite my endless attempts, the Other eludes enclosure (1997:59). It is also, paradoxically, a liberation: the beloved’s offering liberates the lover from the “burden of being free,” whereby Levinas calls into question our conception of freedom (1997: 45).

What counts for the love relationship also counts for the ethical relationship. What binds the self to the Other is not some quality different from other qualities, but the very quality of difference. To keep the ethical relationship open requires me to view the Other in the singular and not as a foregone instance of a plurality. The moment that the Other becomes but one other among many, I have separated love from its wisdom, and I look upon the Other not in

its otherness but as a cultural other, different and harmless to my being. This, for Finkelkraut, has been the temptation of all humanity: to evade the ethical relationship by relegating the Other to a plurality and rendering his group as inferior or as immoral oppressor. Then I am able to see the other as my enemy and I am justified in killing her.

3. The Totalitarianisms of Cain and Abel

Finkelkraut relates the dramatic stories of two historical figures who befell such a fate: Germana Stefanini, a sixty-seven-year-old Italian woman put on trial and sentenced to death in 1983 by the Red Brigade for taking a job as a prison guard where communists were held prisoners; and Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a French officer convicted of treason in 1894. In both cases the revelation of the Other's face was erased and covered with the mask of an enemy. The enemy in Stefanini was her social position, her function and her class and the principles this represent. Her pleas that she had no choice but to take the job so as to make a living after the death of her father fell on deaf ears. In fact, the Brigadists had to resist listening to these reasons, because they belied a deeper knowledge to which they had access: she is a capitalist and an oppressor. "To be moved by her – in a kind of fatal myopia – would have meant treating her as a unique individual, separating her case from the historic whole that gives it meaning" (1997: 61). The whole defines each person's position, in the totality everyone finds a role. This is the essence of totalitarianism: the individual disappears in her position and becomes mere products of history; no action on her part can change her position and her function according to which she is judged. The judgement on her class determines the judgement passed on her, with no investigation into her person.

Alfred Dreyfus, an artillery captain in the French army and of Jewish descent, was falsely accused and convicted by a court-martial of spying for Germany. Two years later evidence surfaced that another officer, Major Marie Charles Esterhazy was the real spy. The army court-martialed Esterhazy and although he was initially acquitted, further evidence forced the army to dismiss him in 1898. Dreyfus' case was appealed in 1899, but this second court-martial again pronounced him guilty. Public outcry against the ruling was so vociferous that a liberal government was voted into power shortly after the trial. The new government nullified the verdict and pardoned Dreyfus, finally reinstating him in 1906. The so-called Dreyfus Affair divided the French public into two camps, those who supported the verdict in a fury of anti-Semitism and those who accused the army of unfair judgment. Finkelkraut focuses on

this anti-Semitism in the case against Dreyfus. His accusers judged him because of his Jewish background, which was enough to make him guilty. No further evidence was needed. Any pleas on his part belied a deeper truth: he was a traitor of the French people.

Despite the similarities of these cases, they differ in one important aspect: Stefanini is killed in the name of the Revolution and of class, while Dreyfus is judged in the name of the Nation. She is an oppressor, he a traitor. How, asks Finkielkraut, did the horrors of the twentieth century happen? By grouping individuals into class and ethnicity. Dreyfus' background and Stefanini's class justify them being convicted. The motive for imprisoning Dreyfus is in his being a hindrance to the fulfillment of the group, to remove this weakness that prohibits the expansion of 'our' power. The dream is that of a uniform humanity where none is a stranger and where the Other does not upset my plans. The motive for killing Stefanini is the opposite: siding with the weak and the oppressed and dividing humanity into two classes and a system that privileges some and oppresses the majority.

"Both of these parties, the mad heirs of communism and those minor precursors of the Nazi scourge, break all social bonds between themselves and their enemies, even judicial ones, in favor of the supposed insight into those enemies they possess. ... The first group wants to be able to say 'We' without any hindering scruple placed on the unfolding of their essential power. To sustain an unchallenged sense of being, they destroy within themselves [with reference to Sartre] the weakness of being for others in order to become like a raging torrent or a self-generating power. The second group, on the contrary, sacrifices themselves – with complete sincerity – for the weak and the lost. They kill not the Other but *for the Other*, out of loyalty to their ethnic destiny, not in open revolt against a responsibility they have chosen as their own" (1997: 116).

Both claim to act in the name of humanity or of the people, but with two competing conceptions. In the one the people are everyone in society, and all have equal access to membership in the single humanity. To oppose this ideal is to be the enemy of humanity – you are either human or non-human. In the other inequality wins out and two humanities come into existence: "the plebeians and their enemies" (1997: 124). Here everyone also belong to the people, to whom the Revolution aims to return sovereignty. To oppose the revolution is to place yourself in the opposite class: you are either human or the enemy of the people. In both totalitarian thought turns the voice of the individual into the underlying (and truer) voice of society, nation, race or history. The totalitarian question par excellence, says Finkielkraut, is the question "From where are you speaking?" "From what context do you speak?" "Who, when you think you are speaking, is speaking in you?" (1997: 66). This is the "true face" that totalitarianism unmasks and judges, as opposed to the encounter with the face of the Other that the wisdom of love upholds.

When Cain kills his brother he complains to God, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Interpreting this plea, Finkelkraut places Cain into the first group: Cain is insulted by his brother’s difference and blames God for not guaranteeing the unity between them, and for creating human beings as separate individuals. He surrenders his responsibility for his brother to the idea of unity with God. This is done in contrast to his *being created*, which implies being separated from the creator and from other creations. In nullifying this separation and unifying the human with the divine, he can now blame God who did not use his eternal power to stop Cain. What he in actual fact says is: “I am not my brother’s keeper, it’s You, You the father of us both, who gave me the Wicked Turn, and who didn’t put a stop, though you could have, to my criminal act” (1997: 74). This is one version of man in the plural’s rebellion against the separation of human beings into singular, responsible individuals. To Cain’s descendents belong amongst others the accusers of Dreyfus and the Nazis.

But “Abel’s camp can be just as murderous,” warns Finkelkraut (1997: 117). Love of the oppressed grants the liberation fighter a similar surrendering of responsibility. Killing a helpless being becomes the armed struggle, justified by the desire to bring justice to those oppressed by an unjust system. This is the second version of man in the plural, and here belong, amongst others, Germanini’s killers and communist Marxism.²

Two opposing forms of totalitarianism – those of Cain and Abel – are here united in their desire to complete totality and eliminate otherness. They share the symbol of the *people*, man in the plural, and they oppose this to the Other who appears to me in a *face* that chooses me and singularises both me and the Other; they are united in their hatred of this unchosen love.

4. Romanticism versus Enlightenment

In his later work, *The Defeat of the Mind*, Finkelkraut uses the term Romanticism to designate the collectivist form of thinking that he called totalitarianism, referring

² An interesting example of the opposition between these two forms of totalitarianism may be found in the supporters of and struggle against apartheid. The Afrikaners dreamed of a pure and unified Afrikaner nation free from outside influence – Cain’s desire – while many fighters against apartheid, although justified in their opposition to an oppressive system, fought in the name of ‘the people’ and against the oppressors – Abel’s camp. Of course, many that opposed apartheid did envision a free South African society for all citizens to take part in.

specifically to the German concept of *Volksgeist* (although Romanticism is obviously not limited to this instance, as he will demonstrate). Where *The Wisdom of Love* offered a conceptual discussion of forms of collectivism, he now gives a more historical glance of the development of romanticism in its various forms in Europe since the nineteenth century. The influence of Levinas on his work also becomes less distinct.

He contrasts Romanticism with Enlightenment, which is the vision of man in die singular. The Enlightenment (at least in its French form) saw every human being not as a captive of his or her history, but as an autonomous individual. In the words of Renan, “man is a rational and moral being, before he is closed off in such and such a language, becomes a member of such and such a race, the faithful follower of such and such a culture.” Finkielkraut goes further to articulate this separation:

“From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment the modern age sought to deliver the human spirit from the revealed truth and dogmas of the Church. Liberated from established teachings, man became answerable only to reason. He went forth from childhood (to use Kant’s famous formulation) and proclaimed himself ready to think for himself without the help of his father. ... Renan separated the life of the mind from the community in which it took root. Man had the ability, Renan maintained, to break away, to lift himself out of his context and escape his national heritage, to speak, think, and create without bearing witness, necessarily, to the totality from which he came” (1995: 33)

Where the classic example of Romanticism was the German *Volksgeist*, the typical example of Enlightenment was the universal ideals of the French Revolution. The eighteenth century originators to these two developments were Herder and Voltaire. Voltaire maintained the idea of fixed values accessible by reason, as initially introduced by Plato. For Herder in 1774, such universalism was nothing but arrogant French intellectualism – French Enlightenment ideals posing as universal ideas and forced onto other nations, “attributing eternal dimensions to a particular time-bound way of thinking” (1995: 8). For him all ideas were national ideas, bound to a specific context and never the ideas of a free and rational individual. Reason did not hold sway over history, in fact, “it was reason that was historical,” and every idea had its own reason and immanent necessity. All nations had a unique form of life that could not be exchanged for any other; it’s own *Volksgeist* (1995: 7).

It was only some fifty year later that Herder’s ideas would catch on in Germany, after Napoleon’s occupation of Prussia. With the French occupying certain of its principalities, Germany regained its sense of unity through the *Volksgeist*. “The nation,” says Finkielkraut,

“found solace from the humiliation it was suffering through the marvelous discovery of its culture” (1995: 9).

By this time France had already undergone the “trauma of the Revolution” and was experiencing its own wave of the collectivist spirit. The Revolutionaries viewed the nation (in defiance of the term’s root *nascere*, ‘born’) as a contract between equal individuals – “associates” – erasing national history, class divisions and “a thousand years of social and political relationships” (1995: 11). The government was constituted by the people, who ruled not from above like the *ancien regime*, but from below. The paradox of this new concept of nation is that ‘the people’ became a collectivity who ruled via a unity of their wills as a national collective, thus diverging from the Revolution’s original Enlightenment ideals of free and voluntary association. For the conservatives, critical of the Revolution and aggravated by the terror of the Napoleonic dictatorship, this was proof that there never was a social contract, that no assembly of men could become citizens by virtue of decree or individual will. For them, people had always conformed to the practices and customs of their group just as they had to learn to speak in a language to be heard. “From the very beginning,” they argued, “whether we speak about language or nation, people entered into a game whose rules they had nothing to do with establishing but had to learn and respect all the same” (1995:13). From this the traditionalists postulated the idea of nation as an all-encompassing totality, rejecting the idea of free association. The nation represented a kind of collective unconscious that still functioned to govern the country from below, albeit by placing the nation below the individual.

“Since people were the work of their nation, the product of their environment, and not the other way round, as Enlightenment philosophers and their Republican disciples believed, *human beings had to be declined in the plural*: they were nothing more than the sum of their particular parts, the sum of those who had peopled the earth. And here [the counterrevolutionary] de Maistre joined Herder in saying: ‘Nations have a general overriding *soul* or character and a true moral unity which makes them what they are. This unity is first and foremost determined by language’” (1995: 16).

France had finally joined Germany in the idea of a national spirit, but in the process it had rid itself of any notions whatsoever of the universal. Where religion and philosophy in the *ancien regime* had been the seat of transcendental values, all was now placed under the rule of the nation. For the counterrevolutionaries the church merely served to provide divine legitimation to the nation, in the process destroying metaphysics and clearing away all abstraction. Institutions and customs were valid by virtue of their age, having proven their truth by

surviving over countless generations. “Having done away with metaphysics, truth only existed in the durability of things” (1995: 21).

However, history once again played a trick on the minds of the thinkers of the nation when Germany annexed the French province of Alsace-Lorraine in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. The Alsatians, although living in France, spoke German and therefore, according to the romantics, belonged to the German culture and land. The French response was not to try and argue the Alsatians’ French origins, but to revert to the idea of free association: they longed in their hearts to belong to France. Nation for them was an *implicit contract* (Renan), demonstrating “without a doubt that language, inherited characteristics, and tradition did not exercise absolute power over individuals” (1995: 30). While the Dreyfus Affair still echoed the romantic notion of ethnic bondage (guilty by virtue of his roots), France managed to loosen itself from this grip and “preferred, in extremis, a society constituted by contract over one based on the idea of a collective spirit” (1995: 46-47).

Germany, however, had gone the other way. To them the German character of the cathedral in Strasbourg was nothing else than a monument that Alsace belonged to them and that they had the right to make it part of Germany. The Alsatians’ rebellion against their ethnic origins was a futile exercise doomed to fail. They were not free to decide where they belong. “Reducing culture to the cult of origins, the Volksgeist triumphed, revealing in the process its totalitarian potential” (1995: 40). The result of this was twofold: suppressing the individual and cutting humanity up into sharply demarcated groups with impenetrable borders. The first result produced a *power without limits*, while humanity’s fragmentation signaled the start of the *full-scale war*: the enemy was not human, but “belonged to a different species entirely ... [who] would fight without mercy” (1995: 42). As may be expected, German nationalism fed French patriotism as the idea of revenge took hold on both sides. In contrast to their philosophical judgments about the nation, France began to speak the same language as the Germans, both now favoring an “ethnic conception of nationhood over an elective one” (1995: 44). To phrase this in the language of *The Wisdom of Love*: both nations were raising the totalitarian flag of a single humanity, one under the name of Germany and the other under the name of France, and whoever resisted this name was the enemy.

And so, in the contest between the two ideals of the nation, man and culture – actually the conflict between the Enlightenment philosophers and their opponents of the Romanticism – reached a climax by the end of the nineteenth century. The stage was set for a brutal century.

5. Philosophers of the decolonisation

Of course the plural-singular divide has never been a clear-cut one, and this was demonstrated by one of these brutal stages of history: the colonisation of the Americas and Africa until the end of the nineteenth century and the process of decolonisation in the second half of the twentieth century. Finkielkraut places this within his scheme of man in the singular against man in the plural, demonstrating how both movements once again took the latter position: colonisation by acting along ethnocentric lines and decolonisation by denying universal values and affirming the diversity of cultures.

Colonisation was not born out of romantic notions of exotic cultures and places. Although the main driving force was economic and geographic expansion, the justification for this imperialism was found in the Enlightenment ideal of universal values. The West deemed themselves the possessors of these values, and turned them into a model of civilization, employing them as absolute criteria to judge the level of civilization of other peoples. Anthropology emerged as the school of this new science and plotted the way for savages and barbarians to rise towards the level of civilization. The human race became one single body, all in various stages of progress towards a final destiny. And Europe led the way.

“Given the differences, conquest seemed to offer the most expeditious and *generous* way to bring people who remained so far behind into the orbit of civilization. Advanced nations had a mission: to hasten the march of non-Europeans toward a life of instruction and well-being. For the very salvation of primitive peoples Europeans had to absorb these differences – that is, this backwardness – into Western universality” (1995: 55).

This vision was shattered when the very field of Anthropology discovered that these ‘backward’ cultures had their own complex sets of rules and customs governing their lives. Claude Levi-Strauss was one of the most vocal in this new-found confession of diversity, writing in an essay for UNESCO in 1951 that differences pertained “to geographical, historical and sociological circumstances, not to any specific aptitude linked to the anatomical or physiological constitution of blacks, yellows or whites” (cited in Finkielkraut 1995: 54). Now differences were not a measure of rank or progression and terms

such as savagery, barbarianism and civilisation lost their scientific validity. The only barbarians left were those who still believed in barbarism. For the rest, differences between people merely divided them into identifiable groups, each of whom employed certain values (as concrete products) instead of truths (as potential capabilities). Enlightenment was no longer a possibility. Instead of “opening others to reason,” it was now a matter of “opening ourselves to the reason of others” (1995: 57). What remained was *cultures* in the plural, and the West became only one kind of culture with its own intrinsic customs and values, one of which happened to be the idea of historical progress, but which no longer had any universal validity.

Finally, in order to prevent any romanticising of other cultures (as for instance ‘noble savages’), all cultures had to be proclaimed equal and contingent. Herder and the German Romanticism resurfaces with the notion of “the inexhaustible diversity of peoples in all their unique possibilities” (1995: 64). The same dialectic of man in the plural was at play.

“[L]ooking for the particular, the historic, the regional behind everything that might be mistaken for universal, they found themselves staging an old play, changing the characters and scenery only slightly. In the new version the West took the role France once played all by itself, and the action expanded to consider the relation Europe had with the rest of the world as well as with diverse members of its own society. Despite these changes the drama remained the same: the conflict between those who saw man in the singular and those who saw him in the plural. Thus the philosophy of decolonization fought ethnocentrism with the arguments and concepts molded by the German romantics in their struggle against the Enlightenment” (1995: 64-65).

The crucial difference, says Finkielkraut, was that national pride was not the source of this new romanticism, but westerners’ guilt and a desire to atone for the excesses of colonisation and imperialism. Where Herder was speaking for the German Volk, the philosophers of decolonisation were speaking for the Other. Although they opposed ethnic nationalism (such as the idea of *Volksgeist*), they came to the similar conclusion as romanticism: “down with universal values” (1995: 66).

The natural step to confirm the equality of diverse cultures would be to grant independence to the peoples subjugated by the West. In order for the oppressed to regain their dignity and identity as human beings in their own right, such cultural relativism played an important role – and one that Finkielkraut supports – to hasten the process of decolonisation. But once translated into political terms this very idea of cultural identity became the new totalitarianism of the states of decolonisation; the most fitting form of government turned out

to be single-party systems. Since one's cultural identity had guaranteed liberation from the degradation and oppression of colonialism, you had to belong to a group. Once again, tragically, there was no place for the individual, who increasingly found herself at the mercy of one-party rule (and often ruthless dictatorship). It is worthwhile to once more cite Finkelkraut's entreaty on this matter:

"Left to themselves, the formerly colonized became their own captives, stuck in a collective identity that had freed them from the tyranny of European values. No sooner had they said, 'We won,' then they lost the right to express themselves in anything but the first-person plural. We: the pronoun of authenticity recovered, of obligatory homogeneity. This pronoun evoked the warm feeling of a fraternity of soldiers, proclaiming grammatically that colonial rule weathered badly, that it had frozen and cracked. This was the birth of a community unto itself, the end of a period when members of the same nation could fight among themselves. ... Thus, once the war was over and sovereignty achieved, what incentive was there to reinstate the individual? Throughout the struggle for liberation the new nations called the very idea a pathology. For what miraculous reason would they now turn around and make the individual a positive principle after the victory? How could this organic whole, this indivisible unity – celebrated during combat – be transformed into an association of autonomous people once they all lay down their arms? A nation whose primary goal was to wipe out the individuality of its citizens could not become a state committed to protecting their rights as individuals" (1995: 69, 71).

The paradox of decolonisation was the fact that it both denied universalism by affirming cultural relativism (and with it man in the plural) and defended universalism in the name of the revolution, aiming at a humanity emancipated from all oppression (and therefore at man in the singular). The flaw in the philosophy of decolonisation was to confuse two opposing processes. The result: "fighting the evils of ethnocentrism with the weapons of the *Volksgeist*" (1995: 78).³

³ The case of decolonisation offers a fascinating confluence of Finkelkraut's two conceptions of the term 'people' which he identified in *The Wisdom of Love*. The initial struggle against oppression takes the form of what he labeled Abel's camp (the example of Germana Stefanini), while 'the people' after liberation could be seen to take the position of Cain (the example of the Dreyfus Affair). Thus, the same group of people underwent two forms of thinking about their collectivity in quick succession – a truly complex experience. Furthermore, Finkelkraut's exposition here leaves out of account the traditional inclination of many African societies (as with most pre-industrial societies) toward collectivism, which would have strengthened group allegiance after decolonisation. His perspective does, however, offer an illuminating contribution to a process normally ascribed solely to traditional features or domestic failures and not to the influence of philosophies of decolonisation. Many examples of the ideal for unity in post-colonial nations exist. Kenneth Kaunda, the first president of Zambia, urged his people to "go forward together and build *one Zambia, one nation*" (Griffiths 1985: 130, my emphasis), which became the rallying cry of his ruling party. Zambia was a state of five million people of 72 ethno-linguistic groups, which made this task daunting. A similar ideal for unity was present in the rule of Hastings Banda, president of Malawi and a member of the Chewa ethno-linguistic group. Shortly after his one-party rule took over after independence he was proclaimed president for life and the main opposition group of the Tumbuka was systematically removed from government, while schools and the media banned the use of the Tumbuka language, permitting only the Chewa language to be used. Of course, some measure of nation-building is required in the formation of any state for its citizens to share a sense of belonging, but as the Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye argues, this does not require cultural uniformity as Kaunda and especially Banda proposed. The idea of a unified national culture pertains for Gyekye to a weak sense of unity that "allows for the expression of individual or group tastes, sentiments, preferences, and ways of responding to

6. Finitude and Progress

Finkelkraut identifies another event where the relationship between the particular and the universal becomes fused in order to justify its actions. As if realising that totalitarianism and romanticism does not yet make the horror of Nazism comprehensible, he introduces in one of his most recent essays, *In the Name of Humanity*, one more powerful idea that drove the twentieth century over the brink of war: human progress.

For Finkelkraut (2000: 5-7) the term ‘humanity’ in its universal form of human beings as from the outset free and autonomous individuals is a recent discovery in our thinking. It was prefigured by the Bible’s claim of the unity of humankind and by philosophy’s search for truth free from all chains of tradition. However, wherever it was employed this term was all too easily turned into a concept of some collective ideal not yet achieved and worth fighting for. One of the most glaring contradictions of the last century was that, in the name of humanity, regimes found a justification for killing millions of people. The shocking discovery about the particularism of Hitler’s National Socialism and Stalin’s Communism was its universal underpinnings: to build a new society based on universal solidarity, large enough to embrace the entire human species. What started out as German Romanticism turned into a war of the universal against the particular, “fought to protect the human spirit from taking root in the soil of the fatherland; to keep the mind free from tradition, action from custom, thought from language” (2000: 45). Finkelkraut agrees with Hannah Arendt in claiming that Nazism rejected the idea of a universal morality when it banished human freedom in the name of ethnicity, while at the same time offering a universal system of explanation.

What brought about this contradictory confluence of universalism and particularism was, much like the case of colonisation, the idea of progress. History becomes a project and the individual disappears in the overall plan. History is not a matter of doing, but of making and creating. Any measures necessary to achieve the goal are legitimate, and so, violence becomes not merely the brutality of a despotic regime, but a necessity on the stage of world history. This necessity is bestowed with moral force by creating so-called higher principles (such as ‘nation,’ ‘humanity,’ and ‘history’) that permits all means necessary to attain them.

local or particular experiences” (1997: 113). On the matter of language Gyekye does, however, propose that a common language be adopted for the development of a national culture, which makes one suspect that some form of social design slips into his work that sounds more and more like the collectivist ideal of unity.

Finkelkraut and Arendt shares amazement at the possibility of the extermination camps, but finds in this created moral order some explanation:

“How could the Nazis, [Arendt] wondered, and we continue to wonder, do something so clearly against their interest and methodically massacre a large and free workforce, one that was qualified and available forever? Anticipating the question, the head of the Gestapo [Heinrich Himmler] replied that no utilitarian or material consideration, no economic or strategic calculation, should push back the date or stain the purity of this operation, carried out for the salvation of Germany and humankind. ... This necessity, for which Himmler sacrificed both his interests and his inclinations, is evolution, a process that does not stop with the human species as it presently is but continues moving forward without weakness until the very end” (2000: 53).

The ideas of necessity and evolution betray the origin of progress thinking: the rise of the natural sciences. Anti-Semitism according to Finkelkraut was a response to the undesirable condition of human freedom after the advent of modernity, a “revolt against the growing popularity of the idea of fellow man and its irresistible universalization” (2000:27). Modern science meant the demise of the vertical social order where religion and cosmology determined one’s position and rank, but no sooner was metaphysical verticality banished when science and biology provided a new explanation for the disparities among people within the physical world. Physical characteristics and genetically determined differences ensured once again the inequality between races. The Jewish race was of a lesser order as determined by nature, not by contingent factors or by intentional motives. History and evolution had determined it such.

The final ingredient needed to justify the extermination was only a single step further: to prove that the Jews were responsible for the German race’s failure to reach that final destiny of humankind. Any foreign interference in the unfolding of the history of humankind must be effaced as a matter of necessity, and in the name of humanity. When *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were discovered in 1920, the spark was lit. This forged document implicated the Jews of conspiring against Germany. This proved that the Jews were evil and that Germany had the task to eliminate them in the fight of Good against Evil. The enemy had been discovered as the accusers of Germana Stefanini and Alfred Dreyfus knew that their words belied a deeper truth. No amount of explanation would take away the fact that the Jews were responsible for the woes of the Germans. All human failure was blamed solely on the enemy, and humanity became a project of freeing itself from finitude and proclaiming the triumph of the will and of unhindered human progress. In a single move all personal responsibility as well as the role of chance and human error was eliminated (2000: 46-47).

Finkelkraut views the twentieth century as the battle between the two aspects of the idea of humanity, ending in “the bloody triumph of history over dignity, of mankind over individual human beings” (2000: 58). Instead of recognizing the intrinsic and absolute value of each individual, the century placed the value of individuals in relative terms, either subjugated to history, progress, nation, culture, ethnicity or countless other ideals. The curse of totalitarian thought is that it views reality not as it is perceived, but as the obscuration of a deeper reality. This is for Hannah Arendt the essence of ideology, a sixth sense that perceives in the enemy its evil position, even when the enemy doesn’t realise it themselves. Quoting Arendt, Finkelkraut (2000: 60) writes, that with ideology, “the concept of enmity is replaced by that of conspiracy, and this produces a mentality in which reality – real enmity or real friendship – is no longer experienced or understood in its own terms, but is automatically assumed to signify something else.”

For Finkelkraut the ideology of progress and human infallibility tipped the scales of humanity in favour of historical reason and man in the plural. This explains how the Nazis could fight universalism in the name of universalism and kill six million people in the process.

7. Recoil of the Particular

What is Finkelkraut’s position in this matter? Although he rarely formulates his position explicitly, it is clear from his work that he wishes to denounce the view of man in the plural. He sides with the Enlightenment model of the French democratic republic, says Judith Friedlander in her introduction to *The Defeat of the Mind*, “arguing that the rights of the other as individual come before the collective rights of the other’s ethnic group” (2000: xiii). Theo de Wit calls his perspective on multiculturalism ‘transcultural,’ with the individual, and not religion, tradition, culture or history assuming the central position. There is a gap between the individual and her community and the aim of every human being is to fill, or ‘cultivate,’ the gap by means of her reason. “‘Culture’ here means the formation (*Bildung*) of the independent person towards a free and autonomous individual” (De Wit 1996: 7).⁴ The attainment of culture is a pedagogical task and this is illustrated in the Enlightenment’s

⁴ ‘Cultuur’ betekent hier de vorming (*Bildung*) van de afzonderlijke mens tot vrij en zelfstandig individu.

emphasis on education as medium to transfer universal values to the young. This is Culture with a capital C, the “life of the mind”, and Finkelkraut contrasts this with culture as it is used in multiculturalism today. When he speaks of the “defeat of the mind,” he means the replacement of this higher ideal of universal values with the pluralistic notion where everything is culture, “from simple gestures made in the course of a day, to the creation of masterpieces” (1995: 1).

Finkelkraut demonstrates his allegiance in both his other essays, in *The Wisdom of Love* by employing Levinas’ ethics of responsibility, and in *In the Name of Humanity* by agreeing with Sartre that “existentialism is a humanism.” Sartre: man, being born (i.e. not produced, but a pure, singular beginning), is a being in which existence precedes essence. Man appears in the world, first as existence, and only afterwards defining himself. “The original humanism is itself an existentialism insofar as it shields man from all conceptual strictures” (2000: 30). For Sartre, as for Finkelkraut, man is “destined to be free,” an inescapable condition and one which human beings often attempt to give up by replacing this singular view of man with a collective image of man in the plural, contained in social and cultural structures from the outset.

In line with this Finkelkraut expresses his reservations about contemporary multiculturalism. To him multiculturalism makes the same error as the philosophy of the decolonisation and National Socialism: it fights the sins of universalism with the weapons of universalism. Ethnocentrism, which is the result of the universalisation of one group’s values, is fought with the universal claim of the relativity of all cultures. All differences become equal, and culture becomes something given at birth, no longer something acquired through human endeavour. This culture never leaves your side and always determines your words and deeds. Finkelkraut calls it the “cult of difference” that eliminates the individual in the name of freedom and divides humanity “into insuperable and irreducible collective entities” (1995: 86). It dresses man in his differences and absolutises these differences as the true essence of who human beings are. ‘You are your difference,’ says proponents of multiculturalism in a celebration of diversity and colour.

However, for Finkelkraut it is not only the supporters of multiculturalism who view man in the plural; the opponents take the same view of man, arguing against the possibility of a peaceful multicultural society. For them, people are their differences to the extent that a

conflict of differences is inevitable: some differences are incommensurable, and since nobody can take distance from their culture, they will inevitably clash. The solution: do not place people from different cultures too close to one another; in the name of peaceful, humane existence, keep them apart (De Wit 1996: 5).

“Multicultural is the key word in the war against ethnic purity, the basic concept of defending the pleasures and virtues of diversity over the monotony of a homogenous landscape. But do not be deceived. Despite their sharp differences and tense relations, the two sides share the same position on relativism. They have conflicting credos but the same vision of the world. In both cases they see cultures as all-encompassing entities, distinctly different one from the other. ... Before choosing, [in this view] ... man has already been launched, in spite of himself, on a collective destiny. Before becoming educated or uneducated, bourgeois or working class, he is part of a culture, submerged, body and soul, in the immanence of his community” (1995: 92, 94).

The result is that it is no longer possible to make value judgments about cultures, since every culture is unique and valuable in itself. Humanism, says Finkelkraut, is replaced by tolerance and uncritical acceptance of people’s culture. Such tolerance means to respect not the other person, but the culture of the other. This prohibits people from different times and places to “communicate about values and meaning beyond the limits of the place where they first appear” (1995: 101). Inhumane practices are only inhumane from ‘our’ perspective and cannot be questioned on the grounds of being the other’s difference. In their effort to grant people their identity (especially after a period of ethnocentric oppression) multiculturalists “demand the right of everybody to wear a uniform” in a cultural relativism that has become a “celebration of servitude” (1995: 107).

As if anticipating the danger of a return to ethnocentrism, Finkelkraut asks whether his critique of multiculturalism means that foreign arrivals must therefore give up their cultural identity and assimilate completely with the receiving culture? He answers emphatically: *“Absolutely not.”* They may keep their cultural uniform and their community ties. One condition only: “that they conform to the model of a nation comprised of free and equal individuals ... [and] the basic rights of human beings” (1995: 108).

With this, Finkelkraut plunges head-on into the dilemma that multiculturalism tries to address. His denial reveals a view of immigrants as from a different culture before they are individuals and of himself as French before facing the other. In this encounter with the other, what is being faced is not only the face of the Other, but also the difference of the other. Nine

years after *The Defeat of the Mind* Finkelkraut formulates this shift in his thinking explicitly in *In the Name of Humanity*:

“Man in the abstract, with no people or place, is nothing more than a man. And as nothing more than a man – as pure consciousness with no attachments to home – he is no longer man. *What humanizes him is his particular place in a world endowed with meaning*” (2000: 101, my emphasis).

How is it possible that this self-proclaimed “unteachable child of the Enlightenment” (De Wit 1996: 7), who earlier in the same essay agreed with Sartre that humanity lies in being born free, suddenly switch positions and claim that one becomes human only *after* being endowed with place, language and culture? Finkelkraut relates the experience of alienation and loss of identity that Hannah Arendt and Jean Amery report during their exile. “Reduced to himself, the expatriate is no longer himself” (2000: 100). In a book entitled *L’Ingratitude: Conversation sur notre temps*, published in 1999, this conservatism is expressed further when he laments the fact that we have become “ungrateful” towards our past traditions, rejecting our Western heritage in our search for anything new and exciting. This striving, says Finkelkraut, proceeds from an abstract and universal anthropology, without bonds and a historical context. Who we are is determined by our culture and by our history; we only become human *within* a culture, tradition or community. Finally, he agrees with those opponents of multiculturalism who argue that there are incommensurable differences between cultures and that conflict cannot be averted (Hooghe 2000: 7).⁵

These views are surprising, coming from someone who emphatically argued that we must view human beings in the singular, repeatedly illustrating the devastating results in history of instances where the view of man in the plural was upheld: Stefanini and Dreyfus, German Romanticism, Hitlerism and Stalinism and the philosophy of the decolonisation. How, to repeat, does Finkelkraut make the switch? Discussing Arendt and Amery’s experiences, he *falsifies* the distinction between identity and humanity; “No matter what form it takes, this

⁵ It may be argued that Finkelkraut is here merely formulating the consistent outcome of his position and not contradicting himself, in the sense that humans can never exist outside of any culture, but that they do retain the freedom to choose which cultural characteristics they wish to take upon themselves. The choice of culture remains my choice and is not forced on me from outside. However, more commentators find in Finkelkraut’s most recent work signs that he does in fact place himself within the conservative position that he previously denounced (Romanticism, *Volksgeist*, man in the plural). For instance, in *Comment peut-on être croate?* (1992) he states explicitly that ‘nation’ is the necessary cadre for the democratic state and that citizenship requires that one belongs to the culture and speak the language of the nation. For De Wit (1996: 9) this is convincing evidence that Finkelkraut did switch his position from liberal to conservative, placing him within the same camp as the cultural conservatism of, for instance, the British philosopher Roger Scruton.

dualism violently distorts our understanding of the human condition” (2000: 103). The individual person’s humanity lies in his identity, not before or above it. But is this not also a denial of Finkelkraut’s whole schema? The distinction between humanity and identity is also the distinction between universal and particular and between viewing man in the singular and man in the plural. Where Finkelkraut earlier explicitly separates these spheres, depicting the one as Enlightenment and the other as Romanticism, and choosing for the former, he now revokes this distinction and *posits the latter as the default position*. No longer can human beings be defined as free and autonomous individuals alongside their culture. Man, for Finkelkraut is, in the final analysis and in brilliant contradiction to his earlier position, only to be thought of in the plural.

8. Conclusion

Finkelkraut’s eventual substitution of the particular for the universal could be traced back to a too rigid separation of the two spheres and a misconception of the real meaning of individualism. It is as if he pushes the idea of man in the singular too far and when realising that we never exist independently of social and cultural groups, he is forced to collapse the two spheres into particularism. This leads to a conception of history or of reason as the sole determining factors in individual lives – a conception out of step with his earlier work.

The social scientist F.A. Hayek makes a similar distinction between the opposing views of humanity in the plural and humanity in the singular, although both are presented as forms of individualism, one true and one false according to his judgment. True individualism does not postulate the existence of isolated or self-contained individuals, but is primarily a *theory of society*, “an attempt to understand the forces which determine the social life of man” (1980: 6). As such, society is not a separate entity independent of the individuals that compose it and institutions are the result of combined human action and not exclusively the result of rational design. This view does not conceive of humans as absolutely rational in all their actions, but often irrational and always fallible. Accordingly, Hayek argues for humility in the analysis of social processes. However, since these social processes are not the exclusive result of individual human design but, to a great extent, come into existence as the unforeseen results of the spontaneous collaboration between free human beings, they often achieve more than human reason could have foreseen. “False” individualism, in contrast, accepts a rationalistic anthropology where individuals employ human reason to design the products and institutions

of the society. Reason, with a capital R, is seen as always fully and equally available to all humans “and that everything which man achieves is the direct result of, and therefore subject to, the control of individual reason” (1980: 8). This leads to practical collectivism, since Reason becomes the principle to which humans in the plural subject their individual actions. By virtue of international consistency there can only be one plan in society if all have access to one undefeatable Reason. Accordingly, the plan, however individualistic in its initial conception, must be a collective plan.

Hayek’s description of true individualism conceives of human beings as free but fallible individuals, and by postulating this as a theory of society, he evades the universalist tendency to view individual persons as abstract entities without any social and cultural standing. He argues that as free individuals, people’s actions are dependent on social arrangements but also continually modify the social organisations to which they belong. Individuals and societies interact in what may be called the *dialectic* of the particular with the general. The sociologist Roland Robertson calls this “*the interpenetration of the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism*” (1992: 100).

This implies that human beings are free to choose their cultural context, but that they always find themselves within a particular culture from where they speak and act and which influences their decisions. The temptation is always to emphasise the one pole at the expense of the other, either isolating the individual from society, or comprehending societies as entities *sui generis* that circumscribe individuals’ existence *in toto*. Frequently, the over-emphasis of one pole over the other is followed by a proportionate emphasis of the opposite pole, and this might be what one observes in Finkelkraut’s own work.

Since both the particular and the universal interact dialectically in all situations, it is not surprising to find elements of both in historical developments such as the rise of National Socialism and the philosophy of the decolonisation. What these cases demonstrate is not the contradictory confluence of opposing sensibilities, but the result of giving prominence to one pole over the other and rejecting the interpenetration of universalism and particularism. Multiculturalism does not, as Finkelkraut contends, necessarily make the same mistake, but is precisely an attempt to acknowledge the dialectical relationship between the two poles and the attempt to evade the temptation of over-emphasising either. What Joppke and Lukes called the self-defeating epistemological relativism of multiculturalism turns out to be its

primary function: both universal values and minority rights must find a place in this ongoing process – a process ridden with human error – to establish a society of free individuals who locate their identity in their social and cultural contexts. Human life is lived between freedom and culture.

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