

## Scope and limits of liberal multiculturalism from an intersectional gender approach

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**Abstract:** The article presents a critical analysis of two of the most influential theoretical positions within liberal multiculturalism –represented by Will Kymlicka and Charles Taylor–. Using an intersectional theoretical and methodological approach, the scope and limits from both positions are shown. The analysis shows that cultural diversity is an issue that acquires new and rich hues when approached holistically remarking the intersections of gender inequalities with other mechanisms of social inequality, such as ‘race’/ethnicity and social class. It concludes that only by integrating and intersecting the study of these variables in the study of cultural diversity will it become possible to advocate for democratic politics that emphasizes the specific nature of the differences, but within the principles of equality and justice.

**Key words:** cultural diversity, liberal multiculturalism, intersectionality, gender, inequality.

**Resumen:** El artículo presenta un análisis crítico de dos de las posturas teóricas de mayor influencia dentro del multiculturalismo liberal –representadas por Will Kymlicka y Charles Taylor–. Con base en una perspectiva teórico-metodológica de género interseccional, se muestran los alcances y límites de ambas posturas. El análisis señala que el estudio de la diversidad cultural es un asunto que adquiere nuevos y ricos matices cuando se aborda holísticamente, colocando en el centro la relación de las desigualdades de género con otros mecanismos de desigualdad social, como la “raza”/etnicidad y la clase social. Para concluir se propone que sólo al integrar y conectar el estudio de estas variables en la investigación sobre la diversidad cultural, es posible abogar por una política democrática que ponga énfasis en la naturaleza específica de las diferencias, pero dentro los principios de la igualdad y la justicia.

**Palabras clave:** diversidad cultural, multiculturalismo liberal, interseccionalidad, género, desigualdad.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Liberal multiculturalism<sup>2</sup> (Kymlicka, 2003: 59-63) is considered one of the most influential responses to how to study cultural diversity.<sup>3</sup> It appears in the second half of the XX century, mainly in North American countries, such as Canada and the United States, to address a series of claims from minorities —gay, African-American people, ethnic groups, among others— that range from the juridical to the educational.

As a theoretical-academic answer to the social struggle for recognition,<sup>4</sup> multicultural debate has produced confusion regarding the network of concepts dealt with and controversy on the definition of the terms it refers to. The conceptual frameworks developed by various authors from diverse trends will define, for example, to which extent certain unmodified orders proper to each culture are going to be privileged.

Here, key terms are those of “difference” and “culture”: how they are defined, how they limit and reinforce similarities and divergences, features or suppositions, always contributing in an interesting manner, never neutral and most of the times unstable, with ad hoc construction and comprehension. This way, even if the scope and limit of conceptions on cultural diversity have been broadly discussed —not only from the standpoint of multiculturalism,

1 The present work is part of FONDECYT (Chile) project no. 1120566, entitled “Ciudadanía para las mujeres en una sociedad multicultural. Hacia la construcción de una concepción deliberativa con vocación universal y su impacto institucional” [Citizenship for women in a multicultural society. Toward the construction of a deliberative conception with universal vocation and its institutional impact].

2 In his latest work, Kymlicka (2001: 39-42) stopped using liberal culturalism, which he had used up to his book *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism, Citizenship*, and has univocally opted for liberal multiculturalism (Kymlicka, 2007: 61-86). Even if this change is not decisive, we consider it adequate as it connects with the analytically useful distinction —to put an order to the debate— between the “multicultural” voice and the expression of “multiculturalism”. “The term ‘multicultural’ refers to the fact of cultural diversity; while ‘multiculturalism’, to a normative response to such fact” (Parekh, 2006: 6). In the Ibero-American sphere, De Lucas (2001: 62-64) has adopted the same differentiation.

3 Cultural diversity occupies a large part of the political and theoretical agenda (Parekh, 1999; Kymlicka, 2002: 327-328; Torbisco, 2006: 1-9). For a general analysis see: Pérez de la Fuente (2005: 254), Villavicencio (2010a and 2010b). since there is no single class of multiculturalism (*Cf.* Parekh, 2002: 133-150), it is more adequate to speak of multiculturalisms (De Lucas, 2001: 61-102; Banting and Kymlicka, 2006: 9; Young, 2000: 31-69)

4 The struggle for recognition is, to a good extent, a criticism to the liberal conception of liberal citizenship (Song, 2007: 68; Fraser, 2000; Delanty, 2010: 59; Modood, 2007: 68-70).

but also from interculturalism—, these discussions have been framed in the debate on the concept of culture, as though “cultural difference” was the only source of diversity.

In this article we intend to go one step beyond, enriching the discussion on the conceptualizations of cultural diversity from an intersectional perspective, as a way to broaden the debate by presenting an alternative form to analyze and interpret this phenomenon.

The article uses the intersectionality approach to propose a theoretical-critical stance before the panorama of theorizations and conceptualizations in relation to cultural diversity. We review two of the most important theoretical stances on liberal multiculturalism in view of (re)conceptualizing their definitions from a theoretical-methodological perspective of intersectionality. To do so, we start from Will Kymlicka (1989, 1995) and Charles Taylor’s (1992) postulates; their contributions in the sphere of the “first wave of liberal multiculturalism”—which includes works of both authors as well as of other authors from the early 1980’s to the end of the 1990’s— are the most influential at global level so far (Kymlicka, 2007).

### **An alternative to identity policies: the approach from intersectionality**

The intersectionality approach<sup>5</sup> is considered the most important theoretical contribution that studies on women have made so far (McCall, 2005; Davis, 2008; Nash, 2008; Guzmán-Ordaz, 2009). Such approach has acquired a decisive role to face the understanding and the methodological-theoretical resolution to study social inequalities by taking into account simultaneously and relationally the complexity derived from the people’s multiple experiences (Guzmán-Ordaz, 2011: 2).

The theoretical debate on intersectionality becomes relevant, mainly in the context known as “third wave feminisms”<sup>6</sup> — visible as of the 1990’s

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5 As in the concept of multiculturalism, intersectionality has generated extensive discussion in terms of its meaning: while some distinguish it as a concept (Crenshaw, 1994), others refer to it as a standpoint (Shield, 2008) or a paradigm (Hancock, 2007). Well now, it is from its own ambiguity and epistemological incompleteness that it acquires its theoretical-methodological strength, as it is constantly reviewed and expanded, either disciplinarily, argumentatively and analytically (Guzmán-Ordaz, 2011).

6 Although it is in this context in which intersectionality acquires strength, the racialized, Afro-descendants and indigenous feminists were the first to deepen, already in the 1970’s, into the imbrication of various domination systems. Río Combahee Collective, composed of black lesbian and heterosexual women, was the first to propose in 1977 that sex, race, class,

decade— whose concern is mainly to give an account of the importance posed by differences.

These movements appeared as an answer to the weaknesses presented by the so called “second wave feminism”,<sup>7</sup> as it proposed the existence of multiple woman “models”, which are determined by social, ethnical, nationality and religious aspects, among others. The debates in this trend sought to distance from essentialism and femininity definitions, sometimes assumed as universal and which overestimated the experiences of white middle-class occidental women in feminist thinking<sup>8</sup>

*Black Feminism* and Chicano feminism are two radical proposals that are antecedents, as they stand against the effects of colonialism from a materialist, antiracist and antisexist vision (Curiel, 2008) and present critiques to the voids and lack of recognition that hegemonic feminisms have shown so far on the conditions of the “other women”, the different, the marginal; mainly contesting the essentialist and static vision of the category of “woman” (Guzmán-Ordaz, 2009: 4).

It is indeed from these experiences that the concept of intersectionality appears; it was coined in legal and academic terms by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1994) by the end of the 1980’s (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Davis, 2008; Nash, 2008; Winker and Degele, 2009).

Intersectionality can be understood as a critical approach that allows understanding the positions of individuals (identities) in various contexts and from the connections between gender structures, “race” / ethnic group and social class, and the way the intersection between these and other social structures, or epistemic statuses of the difference, can produce complex contexts of inequalities that can, on their own, be analyzed in terms of power and across various levels (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Anthias, 1998, 2008; Andersen, 2005; McCall, 2005; Winker and Degele, 2009).

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sexuality shall be understood as consubstantial, not separated from one another (Curiel, 2014). Years later, Chicano feminists deepened on this (*Cf.* Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981)

7 The appearance of second wave feminism is associated to the new antiimperialist left wing and to the challenging of the paternalism of the social-democrat Welfare State and the bourgeoisie family, as well as the denounce of the androcentrism underlying capitalism (Rigat-Pflaum, 2014).

8 For a general analysis on the feminist theory considered critical to liberalism, see Squella *et al.* (2012: 221-271).

For Anzaldúa (1987), “race” and social class contribute—in the way gender and sexual orientation would do—to the way we perceive ourselves and how we are perceived by the others, playing a constitutive role in the task of undertaking the construction of identities.

After reading Anzaldúa there comes a criticism to the oppressive conditions (for women) inherent to the different cultural systems dominated by the supremacy of the masculine. These conditions are difficult to separate as they are simultaneous experiences of oppression: we cannot criticize racism without referring to sexism, classism, and vice versa.

Hence, considering the intersection of gender with other categories such as “race”/ethnic group or social class in the analysis and comprehension of cultural diversity is relevant as long as gender is understood not only as the set of beliefs, prescriptions and attributions that are socially constructed in relation to the “feminine”, but also in relation to the “masculine”.<sup>9</sup> This is key in as much as cultures are defined from the concept of a masculine hegemonic subject, even if frequently it is pretended that these do not have any gender.

Not only does intersectionality allow giving an account of forgetting women and recognizing sexual diversity, but also criticizing the hegemonic masculinities that are (re)produced and hidden in the “universal”, as well as giving an account of these as social constructions. The criticism to the essentialism does not come only from stereotyping the feminine, but also the masculine, at the same time it only refers to minorities, leaving aside the characteristics and differences existing in the majorities.

Then, intersectionality is understood as an alternative to the policy of identity that allows considering intra-group differences, subverting separations between gender, “race”/ethnic group and social class as separated and disjunctive elements. This way, when we speak of cultural diversity we want to stress the need to understand it from its inherently and constitutively intersectional character.

As such, cultural diversity constitutes a phenomenon intrinsically produced by various conditions that jointly shape it in a way that cannot be defined a priori, underscoring its complex origin and its primordial interconnection with diverse conditions of social identification and discrimination such as gender, “race”/ethnic group and social class, among others. This stance is supported on the principle that no culture shall be asserted without being aware of those sexist, racist and classist aspects comprised in it.

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9 On the idea of gender, see Benería (1987: 46) and Sánchez (2002: 359).

## Scopes and limitations of liberal multiculturalism

The intersectionality approach can be utilized as a theoretical-methodological tool to reflect on the limitations and scopes of the postulates of two of the most representative authors in liberal multiculturalism. The objective of this exercise is to review the possibilities to conceptualize cultural diversity from a perspective that includes in its definition not only the importance of cultural differences, but also its relation and interaction with other categories of power, as well as the inequalities derived from these.

### *Will Kymlicka and multicultural citizenship*

In a debate on cultural plurality we can locate Kymlicka as one of the greatest exponents of liberal multiculturalism. Kymlicka (1996: 13-19; 2003: 29-42; 2007: 61), as other multiculturalists such as Parekh (2006: 179-185; 2008: 80-98), start from a common viewpoint: their opposition to the way liberalism approaches cultural diversity and the institutional design that goes hand in hand, this is to say, the construction of a unitary and homogeneous Nation-State.

In spite of this shared diagnosis, Kymlicka differs from multiculturalists in the way the problem of multicultural assertions has to be tackled, something that should not surprise us, after all our author is a liberal.<sup>10</sup> Let us briefly review Kymlicka's formulations.

His thesis stresses the role of territorial borders in relation to the enjoyment of rights and justice administration, as well as the challenges this implies for postwar liberal democracies, which have undergone intensive and increasing diversification and cultural fragmentation (Pérez, 2007). This phenomenon makes Kymlicka (1996: 14) propose the intention of "identifying some key concepts and principles to take into account and finally clarify the basic fundamentals of a liberal approach to the problem of the minorities' rights".

The Canadian philosopher states that liberal multiculturalism tries to distinguish the importance of cultural identity protecting national and ethnic minorities, but guaranteeing the validity of certain basic liberal principles (Kymlicka, 2003: 59). Then, the State must adopt public policies that enable

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10 From Parekh's (2006: 195) perspective, unlike Kymlicka, nothing should be subtracted from the debate; this is to say, there are no nonnegotiable previous rights, only a stake—somewhat uncertain and naïve, a liberal would say—on intercultural dialogue. For a thorough comparison of these two authors, see Villavicencio (2012).

the members of diverse ethnic groups to express and promote their own identities, however rejecting those cultures that seek to impose themselves.

The starting point of this stance is to understand the relevance of social context as a requisite for the existence of an authentic and significant autonomous election. As supported by Raz (2001:192) “Only by means of socialization in a culture can we channel the options that give life meaning”. The connection of the statement with the communitarian thesis that defends the contextual nature of human beings is evident, with a preponderant nuance: such nature is only valuable as long as it contributes to secure a window of qualitatively significant options for each individual.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, cultures are no longer relegated to the private sphere, as stated by liberalism, but they play a central role in the shaping of decisive aspects in the construction of identity, as it is the case of language, education, or certain national emblems (Kymlicka, 1996: 152-164) that translate as measures that “range from multicultural educational policies to linguistic rights, going through the guarantees of political representation and the constitutional protection of the treaties with indigenous peoples” (Kymlicka, 2003: 63).

Modern States comprise —most of the times— various ethnic and/or national groups, which demands to overcome the liberal discourse of neutrality and accept that inside these groups there will be unavoidable cultural decisions that will affect those groups. Thus the need to recognize some rights of the groups appears, under the banner of a differenced and culturally oriented citizenship, to provide the minorities with the necessary mechanisms to face the discriminations they might experience from the majority culture.

For liberal multiculturalism, the dichotomy between collective rights and individual rights is false, as two sorts of restrictions or protections associated to them should be carefully distinguished: on the one side, there are external protections, i.e., those which authorize the —national or ethnic— group to be treated with the same consideration and respect as other equivalent groups;<sup>12</sup> and on the other, there are internal restrictions, this is to say, those which deter the group from coerce their members, deterring themselves from revising their conception of good<sup>13</sup>

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11 A critical and systematic approach to the liberal-communitarian debate can be found at Villavicencio (2014).

12 For instance, rights to a proper language, an especial statute of land tenancy or right to total or partially autonomous.

13 Typically, the right to punish individuals who turn away from collective beliefs.

Collective rights understood as external protections are absolutely compatible with a liberal theory of rights that intends to foster autonomy, while internal restrictions are unacceptable (Kymlicka, 1996: 57-76).

This way, by conceiving the minorities' rights as a problem, Kymlicka (2003: 59) puts forward a proposal to face the challenge of multiculturalism in a liberal manner: minorities shall be protected by means of specific rights for the groups. This political proposal means to place, together with individual rights of liberalism and democracy, differenced rights in function of group belonging.

Therefore, Kymlicka (1996: 13-19; 2003: 29-42; 2007: 61) proposes to reform or broaden the liberal theory of individual rights, showing that this is compatible with the existence of rights for groups (Pérez, 2007). The challenge of multiculturalism rest on how to prevent majority societies from imposing their institutions on those from a different culture.

Kymlicka (2003: 82-87) is clear to criticize and pinpoint that the concept of multiculturalism is commonly used as an umbrella term to encompass a broad variety of non-ethnic social groups which, due various reasons, have been excluded or marginalized from the majority core of society—for example: the disabled, gays and lesbians, women, et cetera—. For Kymlicka (1996: 36) “a State is multicultural if its members belong to different nations (a multinational State) or if they have emigrated from different nations (a poly-ethnic State), as long as this supposes an important aspect of personal identity and political life”.

From the intersectionality approach, Kymlicka's vision may be partial in the way of the meaning of multicultural challenge. In this respect, it is possible to mention at least three criticisms to this author's postulates that might be broadened from such approach.

Firstly, Kymlicka's theory does not allow giving an account of the minoritization of groups within societies—which “are presented as ahistorical, as though minorities had always been there and were not changing and part of a more complex and broader historic process” (Dávila Figueroa, 2013: 134)— where social relationships that are transversal and simultaneous at the same time concur.

With this, Kymlicka loses sight of the majority and dominant groups, excessively stressing the minorities, overlooking that these only “exist” in relation to a majority that is also internally diverse. This way, the concept of culture proposed by Kymlicka (2003: 78) is narrow for it does not consider the “constant creations, recreations, and negotiations of imaginary borders between ‘us’ and ‘the other(s)’” (Benhabib, 2006: 33). “Us” always supposes



some “another” which one differences from and from which one defines oneself; whereas that “other” must be understood from the crossing of a number of differentiation axes.

Secondly, and following the feminist critique to multiculturalism, the emphasis on minority cultures does not even take into consideration that inside these groups it is possible to identify other minorities that also require attention, as it is the case of women in the contexts of patriarchal cultures.

Susan Moller-Okin’s (1999) criticism has been key to unveil the tension between multiculturalism and feminism; it is based on the existence of a conflict between the claims from minority cultures of religions and the generic norm of equality accepted in all the liberal States, pointing out that multiculturalism is in itself bad for women.

In this direction, Kymlicka’s arguments (1990: 239-62 in Moller-Okin, 1999) in favor of multiculturalism do not take into account what he recognizes in other writings: the subordination of women is often informal and private, and virtually no majority or minority culture in the world would pass his proposed test of “no discrimination whatsoever” in the private sphere.

Albeit, Moller-Okin’s feminist criticism can only be assumed as a wink to an analysis that considers an intersectional approach, as from the latter the essentializing culture is avoided<sup>14</sup> by demonstrating that the internal differences are a product of the simultaneity and crossing of various differentiation axes.

This way, although Moller-Okin (1999) points out the importance of considering women a minority group in patriarchal cultures, whose rights, in the framework of liberalism, are above cultural rights, there exists the risk to “rekindle the colonial dynamics of ‘otherness’” (Deckha, 2004: 22). Intersectionality appears thus as a systematic analysis model that makes it easier to deconstruct and analyze the internal dynamics of groups of collective identities from a non-colonialist perspective.

Thirdly, Kymlicka’s vision focused on minorities’ rights does not account for domination and subordination relationships, which have to be seen from a standpoint that considers gender, class, “race”/ethnic group inequalities.

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14 Seyla Benhabib (2006) sees a problem in Moller-Okin’s (1999) argumentation, as it rests upon a monolithic understanding of cultures. That hinders apprehending the game of complicities, loyalties and tensions that ceaselessly reproduce inside them. This is to say, the dialectic of political rights and cultural identities is lost, and transfers a cultural and moral relativism that deforms the fundamental axis of debate to multiculturalism (Femenías, 2008: 180).

To the extent the author boasts that the granting of recognition and adjustment to the cultural difference implies the disappearance of structural-order problems, his stance —markedly liberal— loses sight of the importance of redistribution that, together with recognition, tries to accomplish social justice, beyond integration, assuming there are problems of political and economic order, in addition to the cultural.

Fraser (2000) criticizes multiculturalism —and anti-essentialism<sup>15</sup>— for not being capable of relating a cultural policy of identity and difference with another social policy of justice and equality basing on a unilateral approach to identity and difference.

This tendency to deal with the difference as if it were exclusively cultural in nature shall be broadened by means of an approach that explains that issues related to it cannot be analyzed independently from material inequality, from differences in power between groups and from domination and subordination relations that occur inside the system.

It is possible to deepen into the limitation of Kymlicka's theory (1996; 2003) paying attention to Parekh's (2006: 99-109) critique to his work<sup>16</sup>. The first reproach focuses on the rather narrow and essentialist conception with which he uses the term culture that directly impacts the clear distinction and the diverse moral weight that the demands of two types of cultural minorities would have: the national ones and the voluntary immigrants.

This differenced treatment is supported on the chances each minority has to provide their members with a societal culture. Since national minorities —being subsumed by a larger State— previously had a proper societal culture, they meet the minimum conditions to provide their members with the necessary frame to autonomously develop, and thereby, they have to be recognized the right to preserve or undertake their own national construction and enjoy some form of self-government.

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<sup>15</sup> Fraser (2000) points out that nowadays the debates on group identities and cultural difference divide into two related currents: anti-essentialism, which re-conceptualizes identity and difference as discursive constructions performatively created by means of the cultural processes that produce and support them (Piastra, 2014); and multiculturalism, which adopts a positive viewpoint in relation to group differences and identities, trying to revalue and foment them.

<sup>16</sup> There is other group of anti-liberal objections to Kymlicka's theory. The most attractive is the one by Barry (2002: 131-146). We have analyzed such vision to a certain depth in Villavicencio (2010b).

“As a matter of fact, their societal culture provides them with a more satisfactory context than the one they would have had, had they been demanded to integrate into the mainstream society, since such is the culture those minorities identify and are more familiar with” (Kymlicka, 2003: 81).

Legal immigrants, Parekh (2006: 99-109) elaborates, are the other end. They are not national but ethnic minorities, they are neither territorially concentrated nor are fully institutionalized, their culture has been uprooted from its original context and cannot reproduce as such in other medium. Moreover, the fact of having emigrated in search for better expectations also supposes a genuine desire to integrate into the new society.

Because of these reasons, immigrants would not be enabled to exercise (and should stop demanding) the right to self-government and cultural autonomy, however they can demand to maintain some of their practices associated to their ethno-cultural identity, which will become faculties and exemptions that Kymlicka (2003: 75 and 76) calls *accommodation rights*.

In Parekh’s (2006: 103) opinion, the key point is that there is no weighty reason to make such distinction. On the contrary, such classification does nothing but to reflect a lengthy liberal historical tendency to outline on the one side, a sheer contrast between ethnic groups and nations, privileging the latter, and on the other, to establish a clear difference between immigrants and citizens.

On the basis of the same distinction made (between national and ethnic minorities), Carens (2000) and Young (1997) have criticized the rigid vision Kymlicka unfolds (1996; 2003), as he only deals with antagonistic cases, omitting intermediate situations, as it would be the case of oppressed groups which, in spite of not belonging to those minorities Kymlicka focuses on, would indeed require the recognition of some accommodation rights (Carens, 2000: 52-87; Young, 1997).

We find this would be the case, indubitably, of sexual minorities and women (*Cf.* Young, 1997: 48-53; 2000: 89-93). No less important, Kymlicka forgets —as we have stated— that minorities gather and behave in a complex manner in reality, obviating that inequalities derived from cultural differences must be understood as the result of the crossing of the effect of these with other important difference axes —such as gender, class, ethnicity, race and sexuality—, which makes their categorization difficult.

Let us think, for instance, of the Mapuche in Chile, who at the same time are a national, ethnic and/or social minority depending, among other relevant factors, on the geographic location they are; while gender and social class are interdependent elements in relation to how inequalities are experienced.

### *Charles Taylor and the Politics of Recognition*

Another relevant stance in liberal multiculturalism is represented by Charles Taylor, who analyzes the recognition of identity of minority groups and these groups' right to difference in multicultural contexts. Even if Taylor (1993: 31-32) is aware of the importance of the universality of rights and equality, for him it is preponderant to pay attention to the recognition of differences supporting this discourse:

[...] it has become familiar for us at two levels: first, in the intimate sphere, where we understand that formation of identity and I occurs in a sustained dialogue and in conflict with the rest of signifiers. And then, in the public sphere, where the politics of egalitarian recognition have performed an increasingly relevant role. [...] With the politics of egalitarian dignity what is established intends to be universally the same, an identical "basket" of rights and immunities; with the politics of difference, what we ask to be recognized is the unique identity of that individual or group, the fact that it is different from the rest.

This way, following Taylor, what is interesting for the defenders of the politics of difference is to stress the recognition of the unique and original identity of each individual and community, which must be protected to avoid their homogenization by the identity of hegemonic communities.

In the public sphere, Taylor (1993: 52) states the problem that if a democratic society can conciliate equal treatment for all the individuals by means of the recognition of the specific differences that in such society manifest or if liberalism instead assumes a stance "blind to the difference".

However, the author denies that this is necessarily so and acknowledges that in liberal thinking, and in some liberal societies, a different stance is noticed. From this, he states the existence of two liberal states: the one that intends to be neutral with the argument that individual rights cannot be restricted whatsoever, thus guaranteeing their equality for everyone; and the state that guarantees respect to the difference and does not pretend to be neutral.

The former represents the politics of dignity, which basically means that free and equal men have the same rights; therefore, the function of the State is to protect and secure those rights. In the latter, each individual and each group possess an identity and particularity that shall be respected, this way, the State is demanded to protect a set of practices, traditions and values that would make it possible for the individuals of the political community to identify with a determinate ideal of common good.

Taylor is closer to the second of these liberalisms. His arguments partly have to do with the affirmation of the principle of respect to minorities and

with the fact that nowadays multiculturalism is a reality that spreads over the world and demands politics open to the recognition of cultural differences and collective goals.

A way to solve the conflict between the interpretations that supporters of the politics of difference and the supporters of universalism make of the modern discourse on recognition, conceived by Taylor, is that of a liberalism substantially committed to certain collective ends, i.e., a liberalism of communitarian vocation that does not seek to homogenize cultural identities. We will elaborate on this idea in detail.

Taylor's communitarianism intends to demonstrate that things become relevant and our choices make sense only when contrasted with intelligibility frames the author calls "horizons of common meaning". These are unavoidable, thereby:

[It follows that ] one of the things we can't do, if we are to define ourselves significantly, is suppress or deny the horizons against which things take on significance for us. This is the kind of self-defeating move frequently being carried out in our subjectivist civilization. In stressing the legitimacy of choice between certain options, we very often find ourselves depriving the options of their significance (Taylor, 1994: 72).

For Taylor (1983: 223-224), modern democracies face what he has called a "Hegelian dilemma". This challenge can be summarized as: since there are no universal moral principles reason can discover or build, how to reach moral systems that do not uproot human being from the communities that are their identity focus in a modern society that seems to be inevitably accustomed to the principle of individual freedom?

Of course, in the opinion of communitarians, liberalism does not offer a good answer, because it is insensitive to the requirements that demand a more detailed consideration of the very community and traditions we are inserted into, in view of discovering which the communitarian values we share are.

The main reason why liberalism is incapable of facing this challenge is that it is a good example of the simplification that affects modern ethics which, inspired by the Kantian idea of the practical reason, fail to give an account of the depth and complexity of human morality. This translates into two structural mistakes of liberalism: in the first place, the urge to found a moral that does without a robust theory of good; and secondly, the search for principles with universalistic pretensions at the expense of excessive methodological abstraction.

For Taylor the only way to give liberal values an adequate interpretation—alternative to Rawlsian liberalism— goes through a detailed examination

of modern society and its malaises. Taylor (1994: 37-47) identifies three forms of malaise that torment modernity and understands as such “those features of our contemporary culture and society people experiences as a loss or decline even as our civilization ‘develops’”.

The first of them is individualism: modern freedom was reached at the expense of escaping from the moral horizons we had in the past that, in spite of limiting subjects it also gave meaning to the world and the roles they perform in society. This way, individualism has a dark side that might be encompassed in the notion of loss of meaning.

The Canadian philosopher considers that the promotion of a permissive society and narcissism are clear symptoms of that negative aspect of individuality. But in addition to this first noxious feature, Taylor introduces other source of discomfort: the primacy of instrumental reason.

Just like individualism, this characteristic of modernity has been liberating; however, “the fear is that things that ought to be determined by other criteria will be decided in terms of efficiency or “cost-benefit” analysis, that the independent ends that ought to be guiding our lives will be eclipsed by the demand to maximize output” (Taylor, 1994: 41).

Finally, the third somber feature of modernity is unleashed by the combination of the previous features and it might be identified as an expression of generalized disenchantment, which operates both at individual and social levels.

These dysfunctions deeply affect the political process and alter its form. Thereby, people can reach to exclusion

practicing a sort of politics that seems to be based on the belief that society is composed, in the best of cases, of citizens mutually uninterested and, maybe majorly, even malevolent in relation to the group in question [...] Or else, the answer can be fostered by a philosophical conception of exclusion, let us say, a Marxists vision of a bourgeoisie society as irretrievably loss to the class struggle or certain feminist visions of liberal society as irretrievably vitiated by patriarchy so that an invocation from the political community is shown as a fraud and a hoax (Taylor, 1997: 364-365).

Then, the way of making politics that naturally comes from these exclusion forms —either supported on reality or philosophically projected, though by and large, a mixture of both— avoids committing to any liberal conception of general good.

According to Taylor (1996: 17-123), the only way to give a new meaning to our culture and overcome such uneasiness that haunts it is to rearticulate the idea of modern identity, something we can only seriously do if we overcome the mere notion of what being a human agent is, a person

or an I, to deepen into the comprehension of how the ideas on good, which such notion links to, have developed.

Thus understood, the endeavor that the Canadian philosopher undertakes is to a good extent a task that intends to recover the moral descriptions upon which our shared beliefs and moral institutions are supported. All in all, this task is not simple at all due to the narrowness of contemporary moral philosophy, which “has tended to focus on what is right instead on what is good to be, on defining the content of obligation rather than on the nature of good life; and it does not leave a conceptual margin for the notion of good” (Taylor, 1996: 17).

We human beings are oriented toward determinate goods and ends, which emerge from the moral institutions and beliefs that provide the fundamental dimensions of moral thinking with content, which for their part are supported on a strong valuing that finds its explanation in a specific ontological conception of human being that starts from some referential framework. If all this is true, Taylor proposes that the study of ethics shall head toward a systematization of the idea of identity of the I and how it relates with a determinate notion of good. Obviously, this course of action implies denying moral subjectivism.

Well now, this systematization of the concept of modern identity necessarily goes through the recovery of the ideal of authenticity (Taylor, 1994: 61-65; 1997: 294-299; 309-316). Taylor points out that its sources are in the XVIII-century notion that people are gifted with moral sense; this is, we possess the capacity to understand good and evil not as matter of calculation, but as something rooted in our very nature.

Hence, authenticity demands two inherent features: it cannot bloom without strong bonds with the others, at the same time however, it excludes the validity of demands beyond human aspirations, which are counterproductive to the ideal as they destroy the indispensable for the realization of its authenticity. What Taylor means is that the definition of identity implies finding what is significant for each one and makes us different from the rest, however this singularity does not rest on the value of the mere choice we make on these distinctive aspects, but in the contrast with our unavoidable reference frameworks (Taylor, 1994: 72).

Unless we suppose that some options have more value than others, the very idea of self-election falls into triviality, thereby into inconsistency. The ideal of self-election only makes sense because some issues are more significant than others; there cannot be a serious defense of our-self election because we prefer to choose steak with salad rather than stew for dinner.

And the significant is not something one establishes, for if it were so, nothing would have meaning; therefore, the very ideal of self-election as a moral notion would be impossible. Its success and misery is in the deeper nature of modernity; inevitably an increment in liberty can make people develop or degrade.

The question not only is whether the survival of identity in a crucible of diverse communities in multicultural contexts can be defended, but additionally if it is possible to demand that everyone recognizes in like manner the value of each of them. This question then should make us ask for the value that is received by or given to these communities, a value by virtue of which such communities might demand the recognition of their identities.

In order to adequately carry out such assessment of the value of a culture, Taylor (1997: 199-220) speaks of a “fusion of horizons”: we should allow our own horizons of meaning to broaden in function of those imbricated in the culture we approach. Hence, that which in principle was considered already established from our own cultural perspective will have to be compulsorily modified in order to try to understand the other’s viewpoint from their peculiar horizon of meaning.

From Taylor’s standpoint, the demand for recognition becomes pressing because of the supposed links between recognition and identity, where the latter designates something equivalent to the interpretation one person makes of who they are and their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being. Taylor’s thesis (1993: 30) is that our identity is shaped, partly, by recognition or lack of, which turns into a form of oppression.

By proposing a narrative model to conceptualize personal identity, the objective is to correct the abstraction of moral universalism anchoring it to the concrete context of community and develop the recognition of the specific differences of each people or group (Nájera-Pérez, 1999).

Well now, the approach of intersectionality also allows reviewing Taylor’s postulates. Since the author considers the recognition of cultural differences constitutive of individual identity, from intersectionality, we can state that he ignores the multiple constructions of identity within various cultures and as such he does not coherently assume an interactive universalism capable of thinking of the other as concrete, this is to say, capable of recognizing the plurality of the ways of being human and distinguishing between them without disabling the political and moral validity of all those pluralities and differences (Benhabib, 1990).



This way, if we assume that identity does not come only from a certain communitarian ascription, but intermingles with other sources of meaning and differentiation axes from which inequalities are (re)produced, it is pertinent to criticize Taylor for the somatic aspect of how identity is understood.

Benhabib (1990) delivers some key elements in this direction, as he points out that the philosopher, in his conception of identity as a narrative, poorly pays attention to the recognition of a multiplicity of factors (gender, “race”/ethnic group, etc.) that determine experiences, and so, the narration of the I for oneself and for the rest.

This to say, as long as the foundation and unrest of subjectivities is dominated by the aforementioned categories, it is worth stating the validity of the demand for social recognition of the proper cultural identity of individuals, peoples and cultures exposed by Taylor, in the sociocultural complications of definition and recognition of the other in terms of gender, ethnicity and cultural diversity (Nash, 2001: 35)

Likewise, Taylor’s maxim that all cultures are valuable can be placed in check from an intersectional standpoint, as this will depend on who values, i.e., from which multiple position they hold.

## Conclusions

The objective of this article has been to discuss an alternative point of view from which to analyze the scopes and limitations of theorization about cultural diversity—from the example of two representative authors of liberal multiculturalism—and from here it proposes a critical alternative that contributes to the study of cultural diversity.

By revising Kymlicka’s and Taylor’s postulates, it has been possible to identify an excessive emphasis on cultural differences over, and against, other differentiation axes such as gender and social class, for instance. This way, both stances, representative of liberal multiculturalism, in their attempt to face the way the needs and claims from differenced groups are addressed, are at risk of developing politics of recognition that emphasizes cultural differences, and ultimately, allows justifying inequality situations.

Hence, even if the ideas of cultural homogenization largely belong to the past, in multiculturalism it is still pending the task of incentivizing the debate on the construction of the cultural not as something homogeneous with clear borders and with a notion of identity as a process—not as something fixed and stable, supposedly anchored to specific cultural contexts—.

The analysis carried out allows us to corroborate and conclude what Nash (2001) stated in relation to the fact that the multicultural explosion has led to a certain simplification of the phenomenon and the concepts linked to multiculturalism; at the same time, it has often overlooked the understanding of multiculturalism as a process of social and cultural dynamics with deep historical roots and gender dimension.

Hence, we support a conceptualization of multiculturalism that advocates for multiple ascription affiliations of a plurality of identities, hybrid, complex cultures in constant transformation process, capable of responding the plural experiences and intersections of gender, ethnicity and cultural diversity in society nowadays.

It is also necessary to point out that liberal stances—in addition to those new ways to construct identity that arise from the postmodern perspective, among which we find, for instance, hybrid identities— are at risk of not contesting the inequality contexts derived from gender, class or “race”/ethnic group in which minority and majority identities are placed.

The stake is to recognize that inequality not only takes place between different cultures, but also “within” cultures, and so, it is necessary to distinguish the treatment levels of these issues. For instance, ethnic difference, as a social construction, refers to different worldviews, which implies structures and categories to think and perceive reality from a determinate configuration. Within each worldview, there are other socially constructed differences, marked by these structures and categories; this way, their analysis and treatment should consider this fact.

In the task of proposing a critical alternative for the conceptualization of cultural diversity, we believe its study and treatment must consider gender analysis as a central agent of such experiences. An important part of this task is to reflect on the complex relation between the objectives of the contemporary feminist perspective and the claims from determinate cultural practices that concur in the debate on cultural diversity and that can be detrimental to women.

But in addition, we must challenge the representation of the “high-class European white man” as a rule and universal subject of occidental political and social thinking from which to a good extent the defining referent of the “others” was produced and which fostered that it is done in terms of a hierarchized relation with each group. It is a perspective in which respect for cultures is kept with equality for all the diversity of genders.

Part of this perspective requires to pay attention to the cultural representation and social practices that limit the vision of the other. Because

of this, in the analysis of cultural diversity it is necessary to bear in mind the intersection of the various differentiation axes that allow speaking of a universe of identities, which at the same time are consequences of diverse power relations that cannot be left aside.

Furthermore, an essential part here is a reading on the cultural difference and the inequalities derived from these and their relations with certain social stratification axes that have to do with gender, “race”/ethnic group, social class, sexuality and nation, since, according to Fraser (1997), it is the only way to design a conception of radical democracy that inspires credibility.

Only by integrating and connecting the study of “race”/ethnic group, social class and gender into the nature of conscience construction, into the production of knowledge and into the oppression modes, will the study of cultural diversity be able to include a social vision that goes beyond the particular interests of certain social groups.

This way, we advocate for democratic politics with emphasis on the specific nature of differences, but within the principles of equality and justice, which can only be reached by society as a whole by means of approaches from various spheres and broad social collectives (Nash, 2001).

We would like to conclude with some conceptual recommendations that serve as a guide to study cultural diversity and which summarize the contributions of this paper:

1. It is necessary to rethink the phenomenon of cultural diversity from the perspective of intersectionality and by means of a processual approach: a monolithic vision can be fostered and perpetuated by policies, agents and structures of hegemonic power.
2. The use of the intersectionality framework enables contextualized readings of power. Starting from the fact that oppression systems are multiple and simultaneous (patriarchate, consuming capitalism, racial supremacy, heterosexual supremacy), which affect both women and men in a different manner. This requires going beyond the mere establishment of diversity by searching a diversity that understands the difference in power when it is conceptualized in the frame of a higher interest in justice and social change.
3. The concept of intersectionality allows deepening into those discriminations and inequalities that take place in subordinate and oppressed groups that self-define as non-hegemonic. However, and to the extent it seems as if cultural diversity is always on the side of the non-hegemonic, the concept of intersectionality makes us notice

- the importance of also considering what occurs inside hegemonic groups.
4. In contextualized analyses on the study of cultural diversity, it would be useful to combine the intersectional model with an analysis of the sort of power that accompanies the structures of oppression that impact, or increase, discrimination against minorities. The ways of oppression can only be understood in a structural context, since the way one experiences race, social class and gender depends on their intersections with one another and with other hierarchies of inequality. This will allow enriching the theoretical reflection on the types of power practices (exercised by institutions and politicians) and their link with the multiple and simultaneous ways of discrimination which they face.
  5. A significant advantage of this combined framework (and power) analysis is that allows better visualizing the relation between inequality structures and the social privileges that come from them. Moreover, it casts new light on the position of determinate individuals inside minority groups.
  6. It is important to carry on clarifying the conceptual framework and linguistic baggage with which the phenomenon of cultural diversity is approached. Concepts and terminology have a key political value.
  7. The absence of gender perspective at the moment of theorizing can turn into the perpetuation of hierarchical differentiation between sexes, and by extension, into other types of identity divisions. In practical terms, this can operate in an inimical manner to build new expression spaces for those voices that traditionally have been silenced in society.

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