

## The global clash of inequalities: multiculturalism and its limits

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In the last twenty years in international forums and in national debates in many countries, three closely interrelated *metaphors* have been at the center of controversy: *multiculturalism*, *cultural identity* and *cosmopolitanism*. If we go through the history of these disputes in influential books and international meetings, the following may be mentioned as significant milestones:

It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future. (Samuel Huntington, "The clash of civilizations", 1993.)

In 1999, Mohammed Khatami, then President of Iran, launched the initiative *Dialogue among civilizations* as an explicit response to Huntington's thesis. A few years before that, the report *Our creative diversity: report of the World Commission on Culture and Development* was published by UNESCO (1996).

322 In Huntington's book, certain notions were interpreted differently in some national contexts and audiences. In the case of *The clash of civilizations*, the key words were *civilization* and *culture*. In China the topic of civilization inspired debates on cultural genealogies and the historical continuity of Chinese or Confucian values. In Iran the idea was to change the terms of the *civilizational encounter* from conflict to dialogue with President Khatami but essentially accepting the idea of *cultural boundaries* and the *continuity of cultural identity*, and *fault lines*. In Latin America the subject was looked at from the outside and commented as a conflict between Islam and the West. However in the vision of Samuel Huntington, Latin America was not included in Western civilization. Later, in some countries such as Bolivia, the multicultural discussion combined with the indigenist and ethnic politics in the country, leading to the Pluriethnic Bolivian State.

September 11, 2001 and subsequent interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq amplified these controversies internationally. In 2004, Samuel Huntington published *Who are we? The challenges to American national identity*, shifting the topic of international conflict to American cultural identity, perhaps the real theme of his former book.

In 2005, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, then President of Spain, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish Prime Minister, called for the creation of the *Alliance of Civilizations*.

In the shadow of September 11, and also reflecting European concerns (terrorism and immigration), Islam has been central to this dialogue, now redefined as intercultural. The historical background comprised the many international forums on interreligious dialogue since at least the World Parliament of Religions, assembled for the first time in Chicago in 1893. Moreover, in the postwar period, representatives from non-Western traditions participated in the drafting of the UN Charter of Human Rights.

However, as a very central topic, the question of *cultural identity*, the idea that *culture matters*, started in the late 80s in the so-called “curriculum wars” of some major American universities (Stanford, Berkeley, Columbia, Chicago) with repercussions in major media in the USA and in global public culture.

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This debate was the expression of major demographic and sociocultural changes in the American society after the Second World War. These changes can be expressed as an historical change from *cultural pluralism*, in the twenties, to *multiculturalism* in the sixties, to a *postethnic* America today (Hollinger, 1995).

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was one of the key turning-points in the making of contemporary American society. The ideas and imperatives of the Cold War, the Great Society, and the civil-rights revolution combined in legislation that fundamentally changed U.S. im-

migration policy—and the composition of the American population. Few leaders anticipated the full effects of the change, which transformed the ethnic mix of the United States and helped to stimulate the Sunbelt boom. The new law initiated a change in the composition of the American people by abolishing the national quota system in effect since 1924. Quotas had favored immigrants from Western Europe and limited those from other parts of the world. The old law's racial bias contradicted American values and the self-proclaimed role of the United States as a defender of freedom around the world. Immigration reform thus became part of the propaganda battle of the Cold War. The new law gave preference to family reunification and welcomed immigrants from all nations equally and resulted in what is now the new American society. Many historians considered the victory of Barack Obama in the American elections of 2008 as one unexpected consequence of this law (Hollinger, 2008)

### **From the clash of civilizations to the clash of inequalities**

With the arrival of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States in 2009, many of the topics opened for discussion by multicultural policies changed focus. Ethnic and minority issues remained relevant but they were put in another context: Human rights and internationalism emerged at the center of the political scene. Samantha Power, for example, author of many books on humanitarian interventions (Power, 2007) is today United States Amba-

sador to the United Nations. After the 2008 crisis the economic situation within the United States was dominated by the issue of national *social inequality*. Anti—globalization movements and demonstrations—such as Occupy Wall Street—came to be in the center of the public scene. The critique of *neoliberalism* and financial markets, especially from neo-Keynesian and other critical positions (Graeber 2011), were the subject of intense attention from the media.

If *The clash of civilizations* was the intellectual best-seller of the last decade of the twentieth century after September 11, Thomas Piketty's *Le Capital au XXIe siècle* (2013), published by Harvard University Press in 2014, turned into one of the intellectual best-sellers of this decade in the United States and in many European and Asian countries. Thomas Piketty's book was preceded by some similar discussions and has been accompanied by others focusing on the issue of *inequality*. This is the case of *Plutocrats. The rise of the new global super-rich* by Chrystia Freeland of the *Financial Times*, celebrated as one of the books of the year, and the book by Nobel-Prize winner Joseph Stiglitz entitled *The price of inequality: how today's divided society endangers our future* (2013).

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In Piketty's book, the key word was not *civilization* but *capital*. In many intellectual circles in Latin America, the book was read as a return of Marxism to the bookshops after the neoliberal season. Actually, the concept of capital used by Piketty has very little to do with Marxism. This very nuanced book, full of warnings and criticism of Marxism, is a very representative expression of a culture

well established in the postcommunist age in the circles of power in France. From other ideological positions in Paris, the newspaper *Libération* regretted the absence of the concepts of exploitation, social classes and class struggle in *Le Capital au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle*.

Naturally, this issue was noticed by many specialists (Robert Boyer. 2013) but here I am referring to the general perceptions in different national public spheres. In China a chapter was quickly translated by Ecochina.org and significantly titled: “Save capitalism from the capitalists by taxing wealth”. Another Chinese commentator summarizes Piketty’s thesis and criticizes the potential harm of increasing income tax, as Piketty proposes:

326      Enhancing growth is not that much on Mr. Piketty’s mind, either as an economic matter or as a means to greater distributive justice. I assume that the economy is static and zero-sum; if the income of one population group increases, another one must necessarily have been impoverished. Alternative objectives to such matters as maximizing the overall wealth of society or increasing economic liberty or seeking the greatest possible equality of opportunity or even, as in the philosophy of John Rawls, ensuring that the welfare of the least well-off is maximized, are scarcely mentioned.

In the circles of economists and intellectuals in China, market economy is not perceived as a negative phenomenon, unlike France, where, according to a February 2013 opinion poll, only 20 percent of the French think that capitalism is “a system that works rather well”, compared with

a 55 percent positive opinion in Brazil, 56 percent in the US and 58 percent in China. About 26 percent of French people even think that capitalism should be scrapped, compared with only 12 percent of South Africans, 9 percent of Americans and 1 percent of Chinese (Agnes Poirier, in Al-jazeera, 6 May 2014).

Viewed as a whole and from the relative distance of the year 2014, what was implicit in these discussions was the principle of *equality* a central category in liberal and socialist modern philosophy. This was a very important concern in twentieth-century America with regard to race and immigration. Gunnar Myrdal exposed it as early as 1944 in *An American dilemma: the negro problem and modern democracy*. The conflict or tension between equality and race was displaced from the sixties to the conflict between equality and cultural difference in the form of cultural rights and the politics of identity (Rosaldo, 1990). Probably the author who best expressed this synthesis through the creative use of the Hegelian category of recognition was Charles Taylor, in his influential essay *Multiculturalism and the politics of recognition* (1992).

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Taylor characterized the formation of the issue of national cultural identity in modern Europe as a result of the dissolution of the hierarchical society and the formation of individual national cultures and subjectivities. Despite all his erudition and the plural horizon of his proposal (explained in part by his origins in a multicultural Canada), Taylor's position, interesting in the context of the American debate, is a known narrative of modern Western his-

tory. Recognition, in diplomatic and extreme military cases, was part of the law of nations of modern Europe. Rousseau found that national culture has its origin not in divine law but in the popular will. That discussion was moved to the multicultural American debate on minority subcultures centered on symbols of group identity. Though in the public sphere “culture” and “multiculturalism” appeared as the main metaphor in many discussions of social theory, the relationship between cultural identity and social justice had already been questioned by various authors (Brian Barry, Sheyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser).

### **Multiculturalism, recognition and the American national consensus**

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European postHegelian philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and to a lesser extent Ludwig Wittgenstein were very much commented on in the last decades in the American Universities, together with contemporary thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Probably a symbolic moment of that discussion was the request of a prominent group of American philosophers not to award Jacques Derrida with an *honoris causa* degree at the University of Cambridge in 1992 (Derrida, 1995).

Richard Rorty’s book *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*, influenced by Heidegger and John Dewey, was widely read in this period.

Although Philosophy Departments continue to teach epistemology, there is a counter tradition in modern thought that followed another path.



Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Dewey are in agreement that the notion of knowledge as accurate representation, made possible by special mental processes, and intelligible through a general theory of representation, needs to be abandoned. (Rorty, cited by Rabinow, 1986.)

Rorty claimed that his philosophical rejection of foundations did not mean that he was a moral relativist, nor did it require him to abandon his political commitments—especially to social justice, which he understood as a progressive version of social democracy and economic equality.

He considered that political values such as democracy, equal rights, and respect for others are non-foundational commitments that North Americans and Europeans have built into their social conventions. Hence, we do not need philosophy to teach us how to act politically, because the ideals are embedded in our language and traditions; all we need to do is to affirm them by human sympathy and active citizenship.

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The political philosopher Maurizio Viroli, in an Italian collection of essays on cosmopolitanism, inspired by Rorty's polemics, notes that Tocqueville already wrote that America is a country endowed with a strong national pride. This pride is based on the self-image of being a people who managed to win their own freedom and built a strong democracy, flawed and unjust in many ways to its own citizens and other peoples, "but in the eyes of most of Americans their political system is the best that could have been put into practice until now" (Viroli, 1997). The downside of this democratic ideology is that it can turn quickly into *identity pride*, especially when it feels threatened.

*Shared values* in this case is very similar to *national consensus/dissensus*, a very deeply ingrained American ideal. So it is no coincidence that a conservative liberal such as Samuel Huntington and a radical liberal like Richard Rorty have reached similar conclusions on this point. Most Americans, Professor Richard Rorty, a leading liberal philosopher, wrote, take pride in their country but “Many of the exceptions to this rule are found in colleges and universities, in the Academic Departments that have become sanctuaries for Left wing political views.” They have done “a great deal for different minorities but if the Left is to have influence, it must recognize that a sense of shared national identity (...) is an absolutely essential component of citizenship” (Rorty, cited by Huntington, 2004). What was at stake here was the cultural integration of values under plural forms, a theme further developed by Richard Rorty in a more systematic essay: “Romantic polytheism” (Rorty, 1998).

In the discussion about “cosmopolitanism” or “patriotism”, arguments from different philosophical perspectives lead to similar political conclusions, limiting themselves to a more or less pluralistic view of national identity and openness to other cultural traditions. Charles Taylor, a hermeneutic Catholic philosopher (Taylor, 1999) and Martha Nussbaum, a thinker of Global Justice and Human Needs of neo-Aristotelian inspiration, agree on the vindication of the idea of Unity of Mankind starting from different philosophical views. Nussbaum acknowledges the difficulties of her position: “Becoming a citizen of the World is often a lonely business (...). It is a kind of exile from the comfort

of home truths, from the warm, nestling feeling of patriotism, from the absorbing drama of pride in oneself and one's own." It is a tense cosmopolitanism not without a tragic accent, which recalls the dilemmas of Max Weber, divided between Kantian and Nietzschean philosophical loyalties.

Charles Taylor argues his model of cultural pluralism and dialogue between different traditions with reference to the model of Jesuit father Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) in his missionary project in China. But, as the historical record shows, for Matteo Ricci this was not an encounter between *equal cultures*: Christian revelation stood in a *hierarchically superior* place. Confucian mandarins were located in relation to Christianity on the same level as the *pagan philosophers*. Plato, Aristotle and Confucius were a lower step on the path of Revelation. Charles Taylor's transcendental humanism placed him in a more comfortable situation, rooted in a deep sense of belonging than the thin cosmopolitanism of Martha Nussbaum.

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### **The uses of diversity, interdependence and the social distribution of culture**

Anthropologists, having *culture* and the *social organization of meaning* as their traditional object of study participated actively in this debate (Barth, 1995; Hannerz, 2007). Clifford Geertz explicitly argued with Rorty concerning the issue of *cultural identity*. (Geertz, 2000; see Rorty, On ethnocentrism: a reply to Clifford Geertz).

Cultural mixture, hybridation and variation were some of the issues at stake in this broad academic exchange. In

the discussion, some of the questions emphasized were the underestimation of nationalism and the nation-state building in detriment of alleged civilizational continuities; the importance of symbolic circulation processes and the impact of electronic media—the difference between culture and cultural identity, in particular—highlighting the importance of the social distribution of culture, interrogating the idea of *fault lines* and isolated cultural islands.

332 Some anthropologists became more and more critical of the notion of “culture” (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). *Power, bio/power, and technologies of government* were the new concepts inspired by Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, as well as the singular Platonism of Alain Badiou. If the intellectual trajectory of Social Theory in the sixties went from social structure to symbol and meaning, this displacement can be traced today from hermeneutics to power/difference. From this perspective an American anthropologist discussing Multiculturalism wrote that it is “a social technology for distributing the rights and goods, harms and failures of liberal capitalist democracies” (Povinelli, 2002).

The classical vocabularies of anthropology and social theory were insufficient because they were also heirs of a state-centric world originated in Europe in the nineteenth century and today challenged by the new global environment and a new intellectual situation. Writing from the border of this ontological debate, Clifford Geertz criticized the simplistic talk of cultural values: “difference must be recognized, explicitly and candidly, not obscured with off-hand talk about *Confucian ethic* or *western tradition, latin*

*sensibility* or the *Muslim Mind Set*, nor with wispy moralizing about *universal values* or dim banalities about *underlying oneness*". Intersection, interconnection, is the reality of every "local" situation: "The blocs being gone, and their hegemonies with them, we are facing an era of dispersed entanglements, each distinctive. What unity there is, and what identity, is going to have to be negotiated, produced out of difference" (Geertz, 2000, p. 227).

When social boundaries become diffuse, social recognition, power imbalance and interdependence implode at the heart of planetary postmodernity. The fact that we live in modern, virtually democratic societies in which collective and individual subjectivities are constantly challenged, is at the basis of contemporary uncertainty. That uncertainty is *transversal*, crosses all cultural and social geographies, from São Paulo to Shanghai and from Cairo to the Paris *banlieues*. Of course, the way it is distributed, and combined, according to the political and cultural context, the answers are different, as well as the level of radicalism of the conflict with the States. Tahrir Square is not Catalunya Square and occupied Wall Street is not the center of São Paulo or Hong Kong. In all European societies, with their welfare states built after the war, cultural and racial conflicts arising from immigration is a central theme in the postcolonial Mediterranean context. In Brazil, the cultural integration of minorities is not the main concern of the public debate, but *unequal* access to education, health and *consumption* (cars, computers, cell phones, fashion) are at the center of the agenda. The statecraft and integration of

the nation in the conditions of globalization remains a very central subject in countries such as China, Brazil and many others in the Age of Virtual Globalization.

Geertz stressed the well-known description of the power of electronic media today:

The growth of technology, most particularly of communications technology, has knit the World into a single web of information and causality, such that, like the famous butterfly beating its wings in the Pacific and bringing on a storm in the Iberian Peninsula, a change of conditions any place can induce disturbances any place else. (Geertz, 2000, p. 246.)

334 From a contemporary ethnographic and political point of view, diversity and fragmentation cannot be simply celebrated, opposed to more *traditional* (or nineteenth-century collective subjectivities such as countries, nations, societies). Fragmentation is growing, together with interconnection. Backwardness is lived with anxiety because it is juxtaposed with the acceleration of the production of new and diverse goods. The postmodern festival of consumption and postmodern forms of violence are placed side by side and in interdependence in many settings. In the words of Geertz: “Cosmopolitanism and parochialism are no longer opposed: they are linking and reinforcing. As the one increases, so does the other” (Geertz, 2000).

### **“Slave revolt in morality”: multiculturalism, equality and the problem of resentment**

In the discussion of multiculturalism and identity politics, in America the work of Frantz Fanon on violence as an extreme form of construction of the image of the oppressed

was placed within the context of liberal egalitarianism: the necessity to *struggle* as a means of obtaining recognition. The most quoted work of the author from Martinique is his essay of psychoanalytic inspiration based on his experience of racism in France in the early fifties, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952).

Wrote Homi Bhabha on Frantz Fanon:

He may yearn for the total transformation of Man and Society, but he speaks most effectively from the uncertain interstices of historical change; from the area of ambivalence between race and sexuality; out of an unresolved contradiction between culture and class; from deep within the struggle of psychic representation and social reality. (Bhabha, 1986.)

Frantz Fanon argues that the main weapon of the colonizers is the imposition of the image of the colonized on the subjugated people. The latter has to be purged to free this derogatory self-image. This identity dimension of Fanon's thought was mentioned by Bhabha and Charles Taylor. But the other part of his legacy, the necessary counter-purifying violence was formulated in extreme words by Jean Paul Sartre in his preface to Fanon's last book *The wretched of the earth* with his explicit apology for anti-European/anti-colonial violence. But, of course, local interpretations of this topic of purifying violence can have very different resonances in the context of American university campuses or in postdictatorial situations in Latin America (Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Brazil) or in China, where the memories of the Cultural Revolution are still alive. Anticolonial struggles, national consciousness and real socialism as the

historical horizon were sequences of the European intellectual narratives of the twentieth century. Today these narratives are not very clear.

Yet even the justification and necessity of violence and confrontation of radical struggle to obtain justice has long historical precedents since the revolutions that inaugurated the modern era. The history of *revolutionary mimesis* is still an open chapter of contemporary world history. But the truth is that even justification of violence in certain extreme cases can be formulated as the right to insurrection and to be considered as legitimate in polarized situations as a sad but necessary moment as a claim of political equality and social recognition. Despite which, even thinkers who  
336 were in principle enthusiasts of the revolutionary cause, such as Hegel, recoiled in the face of the radicalism of the Jacobin Terror.

But in the history and memory of modern revolutions and civil wars, not only rational claims of justice are at stake. There are other emotions in these struggles and their memories. The desire for revenge, hate, the pleasure of eliminating the other, dramaturgical sacrifices, and ultimately the erotic sense of action are very present in certain extreme situations and apocalyptic imaginaries (Filiu, 2011).

The modern philosopher who presented the problem of egalitarianism and nihilism on moral grounds, considering it a masterpiece in the process of inversion of values, was—as is well known—Friedrich Nietzsche, who placed its origin in the Christian message. He characterized it as the great invention of the *Slave revolt in morali-*



ty. Of course, Nietzsche was part of the canon of contemporary critical theory. He was, however, generally read in the French poststructuralist perspective—Foucault and Deleuze in particular—as a critic of Power and the fundamentalism of Reason, rather than as a critic of equalization of values and suppression of hierarchies leading to European nihilism. The reception of Nietzsche in the early decades of the twentieth century in Europe was different: as a moral philosopher of modern nihilism and equalizing of values, of bourgeois social morality. In this sense, Nietzsche is the great genealogist of modern democratic resentment. However, few voices in the cultural symbolic wars of the 90s made the association between struggles for identity and resentment.

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Wendy Brown warns against the dangers of *resentment* (the moralizing revenge of the powerless). She argues that identity politics has its own genealogy in liberal capitalism, which relentlessly reinforces the “wounded attachments” that it claims to sever: “Politicized identity thus enunciates itself, makes claims for itself, only by entrenching, restating, dramatizing, and inscribing its pain in politics; it can hold out no future—for itself or others—that triumphs over this pain” (Brown, 1995, p. 74). In the context of Australian immigration policies, Duncan Ivinson, in “Multiculturalism and resentment”, asserts

that there are two types of resentment linked to multicultural politics today. The first, which draws on Nietzsche’s idea of resentment, takes place during situations when individuals are exposed to a structural and systematic withholding of things they want (and need), together

with a feeling of helplessness of not being able to do anything about it. A second type of resentment is of a greater moralised nature, a reaction related to holding another morally responsible for their actions.

In two interesting philosophical interventions, Peter Sloterdijk mapped out this subject: *Zorn und zeit* (2006; *Rage and time*, 2010), and *Gottes eifer* (La Folie de Dieu, 2008; *God's Zeal*, 2009). Jean Baudrillard, in his insightful commentary on car fires in the suburbs of Paris in 2005, pointed to the question of identitarian insecurity and the question of belonging (*New Left Review*, 2006; *Libération*, 2005).

338 It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the value of the interpretation of Nietzsche in the history of religions. But whether or not the connection with monotheistic religion is fully demonstrated, the genealogy traced by Nietzsche remains relevant as a diagnosis of our global circumstance. We live in a virtual egalitarian world, where access to goods—money, basically—constitutes the central question. Almost one hundred years before Thomas Piketty would define the “meritocratic extremism” of the financial market ideology, Max Scheler, in his book *Resentment* (1914) had presented its phenomenology: in the system of competition, every position is a transit point in the overall game. The internal boundlessness arises from having deleted all primary restraint to definite things. But the structure of the apprehension of values leads itself to the conception of property as a commodity, that is, as an object that can exchange in monetary value, and also leads to the conception of life both as individuals and communi-

ties in the form of progress and an explicitly say progressive craving is associated with this conception.

The ideas of progress and regress are not found and justified empirically in life stages, phases considered and defined according to their own value but become selective forms of conception of self, of the fellow citizen and of history” (Scheler, 1938 [1914], p. 37.)

Naturally, in a world composed of more than seven billion people, complex and densely interconnected, dedicated to the values of creativity and innovation, the question is how societies can feed these huge populations—not only ensure basic needs, but the production of new goods. It is possible to do it without an extended price system? What are the limits of intervention and regulation of national states today, where most culturally and socially integrated old nation-states experience serious difficulties? These urgent contemporary issues remain open at the bottom of the crisis of European welfare states with old and new themes of social inequality, separatism, immigration and racism (Giddens, 2000). But they are very present too in countries such as the so-called BRICS countries and others exposed to the challenges of modernization in new socio-cultural environments. The equation equality/freedom continues to be one of the central aporias of modernity.

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### **Conclusion: the psycho-politics of interdependence**

*Inequality* is the most obvious fact of social life everywhere. At the same time, a highly formalized category of equality is implied in all comparisons by which social

reality is measured (Human Development Index, Safety Index, Food Security Index, and so on). The societies in which we live are made up of a superinstallation consisting of airports, shopping centers, gated communities, areas of design and consumer goods to which access is uneven, a very peculiar global city. The shopping center and the international airport in the great metropolises are the symbols of our time and sometimes the project is simply to blow them into pieces.

340      Resentment as a collective and individual phenomenon applies not only to the more disadvantaged, nor is it an archaic phenomenon associated with negative emotions of revenge: it is a characteristic behavior of modern man. Our problem is not external: the Irrationalism of the Other. Apocalyptic violence is not the monopoly of any culture or any religion. There have been apocalyptic secularisms inspired in feelings of humiliation (Nazism is the most indisputable example), religious nationalisms and secular trans-nationalisms. What remains as an existential problem in a changing world is becoming in many regions a gigantic puzzle, the kind of collective subjectivities that can be built or remade. This is not easy in a very unequal world formed by regional and national realities full of wounds which reproduce, perform and amplify every day. Political negotiations of differences are more necessary than ever and there are also very diverse cultural and political resources. The challenge and difficulty is to examine dif-

ferent traditions of democracy and cultural pluralism in their specific contexts. But this also implies putting in parentheses the facilities of cultural dialogue or the mere self-celebration of Western or Eastern values.

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