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Reflections on Cultural Diversity and Cultural Diversity Policies
Comment on Prof. Maddy Janssens, Rome, nov. 2004

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Dear Colleagues

We, or at least I, have a problem. The problem is that I wholeheartedly endorse Maddy's
position. In a sense this correspondence is reassuring, but it does not breed or stimulate
debate.
So, what I will do is raising some questions and presenting some elaborations and
specifications. I follow the order of Maddy's presentation, transforming in part minor points
of difference into major issues of disagreement, viz. (1) her definition of culture; (2) her plea
for diversity; (3) the issue of diversity in view of diversity; (4) the issue of compatibility; and
(5) her proposal of new guiding principles

Ad. 1 Of course Maddy is right in concluding that we have to move away from the traditional
view on culture as a patterned (or integrated), shared and localized whole, neatly
differentiated from the culture of other groups (a.o. Van Binsbergen 1999; Hannerz 1996).
However, that creates a serious methodological problem: if we discuss cultures or
multiculturality what are the units of comparison? How do we define and delineate cultures
from one another?

Ad. 2 In Maddy's presentation of cultural diversity, the constructive, positive aspects are
highlighted. Diversity is seen as a source of creativity and innovation, while at the same time
there is increasing legitimacy for the value of diversity. This view on diversity is also
reflected in the Human Development Report 2004 of the UNDP. In this report it is stated that
policies recognizing multiple cultural identities and encouraging diversity do not result in
fragmentation, conflict, weak development or authoritarian rule. In this context five popular
myths are debunked, fully in line with the Engime-position. Let me summarize these myths. I
quote (pp.: 2-6)
1.   " People's ethnic identities compete with their attachment to the state, so there is a
        trade-off between recognizing diversity and unifying the state.
        Not so! Individuals can and do have multiple identities that are complementary (based
        on): ethnicity, language, religion, race as well as citizenship. Each individual can
        identify with many different groups. Identity also has an element of choice: within
        these memberships individuals can choose what priority to give to one membership
        over another in different contexts." …
2.   " Ethnic groups are prone to violent conflict with each other in clashes of values, so
        there is a trade-off between respecting diversity and sustaining peace.
        No! There is little empirical evidence that cultural differences and clashes over values
        are in themselves a cause of violent conflict. Explanations for these conflicts can
        especially be found in struggles over scarce resources as land, water, or political
        power. Of course cultural identity does have a role in these conflicts –not primarily as
        cause but as a driver for political or religious mobilization. Underlying inequalities in

South Africa were at the root of the Soweto riots in 1976, but they were triggered by attempts to impose Afrikaans on black schools" ….

3. " Cultural liberty requires defending traditional practices. So there could be a trade-off between recognizing cultural diversity and other human development priorities such as progress in development, democracy and human rights.
   However, culture is not a frozen set of values and practises, it is constantly recreated as people question, adapt and redefine their values and practices to changing realities. So, cultural liberty is about expanding individual choices, not about preserving values and practices as an end in itself with blind allegiance to tradition" ….

4. " Ethnically diverse countries are less able to develop, so there is a trade-off between respecting diversity and promoting development.
   No, there is no evidence of a clear relationship, good or bad, between cultural diversity and development. Just as there are multi-ethnic countries that have stagnated, there are others that were spectacularly successful (e.g. Malaysia and Mauritius)"…

5. " Some cultures are more likely to make developmental progress than others, and some cultures have inherent democratic values while others do not, so there is a trade-off between accommodating certain cultures and promoting development and democracy.
   Again, no! There is no evidence from statistical analysis or historical studies of a causal relationship between culture and economic progress or democracy. We have to reject cultural determinism".

However, we have to acknowledge that there is a certain degree of one-sidedness in this analysis, boiling down to a plea for diversity. There is a danger in this optimistic view. The confrontation between cultural traditions is not just creative, it can be - and more than once is – destructive (as of course is acknowledged by Maddy). Because of this 'danger' the link between multiculturality and social integration figures high on the agenda of policitians, public administrators, ngo's and researchers. This integration issue emerges from the ongoing dialectics of social life: cooperation and competition. Every society is built up of a multitude of social links between agents that differ from one other. Each of these links has its own history, its own routines, its own domain, and thus its own specific attributes. Living together must be viewed as a series of processes in which a distinction is constantly made, consciously or subconsciously, between within and without, between we and they, between the self and the other. This filtering and classification underlies every construction of meaning, communication, and action.

The social effects of this categorization are significant. Drawing boundaries and setting standards always entail the creation, institutionalization, legalization and regulation of difference and inequality. More than Maddy, I want to emphasize that the construction of social categories with the aid of principles like analogy, complementarity, opposition and hierarchy, is never just a psychological and sociological game. At stake is the control and exploitation of limited resources. Culture – or the model of and for reality (Geertz 1973) - can be used as a strategic weapon here. Bourdieu (1991:221) put it succinctly: "What is at stake here is the power of imposing a *vision* of the symbolic world through principles of *division*". That is to say that definitions of reality are intrinsically bound up with power. The various majority and minority relations that manifest themselves in a society are directly tied up with categorization of others and themselves. This is one of the reasons why orderings are never only cognitive by nature, there are also socially and emotionally charged. That is why they provoke strong reactions, especially when the established order comes under pressure. In such situations the arena character of society becomes pronounced. It then turns out that society is not a market where free and equal participants freely exchange goods, services and ideas, but

mainly an arena, an amalgam of different interests and social categories interacting in a 'negotiated order' (Strauss 1978).

In this context, the appeal to culture is primarily an attempt to put the problem of collective identities on the 'political-social' agenda – that is, to demand recognition in a rapidly changing world (Taylor 1994).

Seen from this perspective, advocating a cultural diversity policy may give rise to the suspicion that it maintains or even promotes the ' given' inequality instead of changing it. Consequently, a ' progressive' policy may turn into its 'conservative' perverted opposite. This dilemma we have to face, because we have to acknowledge firstly that segration and assimilation very often result in marginalization (an option or better outcome that is not mentioned by Maddy), and secondly that social integration or cohesion is a double-edged sword. Internal solidarity stimulates co-operation and reciprocity as well as social control. At the same time strong internal solidarity leads to animosity towards the external, resulting in xenophobia in extreme cases. The spectrum ranges from feelings of identification (in which the distinction from the other is eliminated) through tolerance to indifference, ostracism, and violence. No wonder that the integration issue, associated with this 'diabolic dynamism of homogenization and heterogenization' (Schuyt 1997), is both classic, current and nowadays even urgent.

We have to envisage a world in which variety of and diversity in core-institutions of society will probably increase. These will partly follow classic boundaries of socio-economic class, region, age, gender and religion, but will also run along new lines of ethnicity and lifestyle. Because disadvantages of this growing differentiation, in particular lack of consensus and increasing strife over scarce resources, can often rely on more public interest than the advantages, increasing demands for integration and decreasing tolerance for variety will become significant social powers. This creates a paradox: the growing diversity calls up powers that hinder the pursuit of integration, leading sometimes to the complete marginalization of certain groups in society. The related risks of racism, religious fundamentalism and ethnocentrism with all the disastrous consequences that entails, as ethnic violence in so many parts of the world clearly demonstrates, converge in our metropoles. Global cities reflect the contradictions of industrial capitalism, among them spatial and class polarization. Here the concept of the dual city comes to mind, the city where a part of the population benefits from the age of information, while other parts experience the disadvantages or are even excluded from the fruits of 'progress' (Sassen 1991). The global cities now have a variegated population showing great variety of social participation and cultural orientation in people living together, or rather alongside each other, in a very small area. The result is not so much a melting pot, but an archipelago of adjacent and isolated islands that have no truck with each other.

Ad. 3 As Maddy has emphazised: the basic question underpinning the choice for a certain cultural policy is the following: in a social situation characterised by big differences in resources, norms, lifestyles and identities, how is it still possible to bring about solidarity, co-operation and trust, or in other words: how can social institutions under such conditions succeed in binding individual actors. The issue, however, is not only social relations 'under pressure' or in transition. Cohesion addresses a more fundamental question. Cohesion brings home to us the fact that humans as social beings are dependent on others. The others are both a means and a hindrance to self-realization while also being the object of care, compassion and involvement. Reciprocal affection and dependence require sustained co-operation and sustainable structures. In their turn, they raise questions concerning the conditions of their genesis, the differing interests, views and positions of those involved. Dependence also entails

risks. Each of the parties involved can, of course, take a cooperative or a competitive attitude. Generally speaking, the question we are concerned with probes the mechanisms and conditions that generate, maintain, promote or undermine solidarity, trust and bonding between social actors (Lucassen & De Ruijter 2002:2).

Efficient and effective bonds between actors in the system depend, on one hand, on social coordination mechanisms, and on the other on what may be called 'trust'. Trust as a form of ' bonding and bridging social capital' (Putnam 2000) promotes predictability, behavioral adjustment and involvement of actors. These are basic conditions for a sustainable community. Trust as the basis of social cohesion presupposes, in addition to the psychological condition of emotional and affective binding, or solidarity, three social preconditions. The first is stability in relations. This requires continuity and routines. The second concerns transparency of social arrangements: the members of the community must know and understand its mechanisms, structures and basic processes. Knowledge and understanding are not sufficient, however, they must also be able to approve these aspects. That brings us to the third condition: the existing distribution of rights, obligations and positions must be morally acceptable, must be accepted as fair and just.

Nowadays in our glocalizing world, there are looming dangers that put these three preconditions of social cohesion under pressure. Instances that spring to mind are (1) the transnationalization of government, economy, business and culture, (2) flexibilization of the course of life, (3) ongoing technological development, but also (4) the credibility crisis involving local, regional, national and international authorities. This has resulted in a 'risk society' that is ambiguous, chaotic and confusing since the various social and cultural systems of logic exist side-by-side. This causes problems concerning, among other things, the legitimacy, activity and effectiveness of institutions that are responsible for societal coordination (see i.a., Beck 1992, Breuer 1992, Giddens 1994). The predetermined, prescribed life of past times has vanished with individualization. In return we have been given an indefinite future, an uncertain environment and a fragmented identity. Many people are now searching for their roots, as we live in an uprooted world where institutions and social conventions have lost their apparent naturalness and stability. We have to realize that we have to operate in various settings with diverse structural arrangements and cultural orientations. In short, it would appear that reality has become too complex, too multiform, too open, too unpredictable, and is now beyond control from the point of view on the Enlightenment notion of control on the basis of functional rationality. Not everyone is led to the same conclusion, however, that makeable society is an illusion or a myth. There are advocates of stronger control. The supporters of this strategy thus confirm the proposition that decreasing effectivity of policy leads to increasing accumulation of policy. Those who maintain their belief in the necessity of 'strong' government increasingly deploy the concept of culture in the struggle against 'limited control' of modern, open, multiform society. They maintain that the government should put a brake on growing diversity through a targeted 'cultural policy'.

Ad. 4 In this context Maddy makes a plea for compatibility instead of commonality. I fully agree. But we have to realize that this does not solve, only shift the problem (although I consider it a productive one). A core problem remains. Although the issue is not to abolish differences but to regulate, recognise and appreciate them, incompatibilities should be banned. Making choices is inevitable when it concerns conflicting views, for example with reference to the granting of equal rights of men and women, the integrity of the human body and the relation between the citizen and the state. But who shall have the authority of making choices? Who shall decide on the definition of public and private: we know that definitions of

public and private are culture-specific. Who decides on the criteria for 'intercultural' dialogue?. Besides, since differences nearly always also imply inequality, this should include the organization of power effects (Van Rinsum 2003).

Ad. 5 Let us now turn to Maddy's proposal of new guiding principles. I endorse the points stressed by Maddy. I just want to make an amplification. The promotion of compatibility cannot be left to the free interchange of powers, or actors. There is a special role to play for 'authorities' of all levels and varieties. They should cultivate compatibility. The problem - or if preferred, the mission - of modern, open, democratic and thus multicultural society is the development of the ability of citizens to deal with ever changing surroundings. This may well have as a result that the 'other' is not denied, excluded or banned, but is treated and respected precisely as the 'other' (Van Gunsteren 1992). In short, the authorities - and, of course, this also holds true for other important actors - should promote the development of competencies that enable all parties to deal with difference more adequately. The authorities are not the guardians of a specific moral in which the tenets of a certain group with regard to truth, morality and beauty are propagated. For that would involve the marginalisation or even ostracism of other groups and their tenets. Nor does it imply that we can completely pass over a situation that has developed over time in which a reality has already been defined and organised. After all, this situation is the result of existing social structures, processes and discourses defended by stake holders . It only implies the willingness to discuss the diverse worldviews, and so to recognise that the situation in 21st-century society can no longer be adequately represented by institutions and values from times gone by.

For this management of diversity it is essential that authorities do not take up a position beforehand. It also implies that the development of new viewpoints and perspectives with regard to society, its morals and attempts at coordination, by definition leads to a struggle for defining power. Integration of new groups means that they will not only have to emancipate socially and economically (labor market position, income, housing), but also culturally and politically. The struggle for the redefinition of what exists will logically lead to discomfort for older stakeholders. Such discomfort is not the expression of the crisis and disintegration of the community, it only marks the process of redefinition with new vitality as a (potential) result. Authorities have the task of making room for this social vitality by the good management of diversity in the community, not by advocating common values, but by formulating common issues and in particular in construing and organizing common interests. National governments and local authorities who do not realize this have their backs to the future. In that respect they are neither modern nor postmodern: they are focused on the restoration of what no longer is.

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