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Deliberative Democracy and the Politics of Recognition

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The politics of recognition is now commonly regarded as a natural counterpart of deliberative democracy (Laden 2001; Valadez 2001; Williams 1998; Young 2000). Both are concerned with fostering a more inclusive politics, and the emphasis on cultural sensitivity and mutual understanding found in the politics of recognition seem to complement the deliberative democrat’s desire for better decision-making (Jaggar 1999; Valadez 2001, pp.94-101). Who would claim that democracy will be enriched by even more insensitivity and greater misunderstanding than we encounter at present, after all? It may be, however, that these apparent affinities mask deeper tensions between these two projects and that the politics of recognition as currently conceived harbours tendencies which would ultimately undermine deliberative democracy.

The most distinctive political demand associated with the politics of recognition is that for the special representation of marginalised groups, meaning that seats on representative bodies be reserved for members of these

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groups (Young 1990, p.184; Kymlicka 1995, pp.131-51). We can envisage a number of reasons for wanting to reform the composition of representative bodies: we might take their current social homogeneity as evidence of discrimination and seek remedies which would secure genuinely equal opportunities, for example. Proponents of the politics of recognition will be dissatisfied with this line of argument for it may benefit individual members of marginalised groups, but fails to capture the significance of representation for group as a whole. How is representation significant for a group? There are two possibilities: that it affords them symbolic recognition as full members of the political community; or that it enhances their political autonomy, i.e. it enables them to have their say in the formation of public policy. I would argue that the latter is of far more value than the former: politics is about taking collective decisions on matters which may have significant impacts on our lives: it is not primarily a symbolic affair. This doesn’t mean that symbols are unimportant: when a US state legislature flies a confederate flag it is sending a message to black citizens that they are not full participants in the political process. We should of course reject attempts by particular groups to claim the state, our common institution, as exclusively their own. Political representatives, however, are our agents, not our symbolic stand-ins, a view which is perhaps more appropriate to monarchical rule than to modern democracy (Pitkin 1972, p.246-7). What our representatives do is far more important than who they are.
Now it is clear that the politics of recognition is by no means exclusively concerned with symbolism. The demand for special representation is chiefly motivated by the desire to make an impact on policy outcomes: it is not regarded as an end in itself (Young 2000, p.17; Phillips 1995, pp.40-1). However, it is true that symbolic considerations do play a large role in the politics of recognition and in particular as part of a critique of the morality of universal respect and the politics of egalitarian redistribution. (Baker et al. 2004, p.100). The politics of recognition’s concern with the identity of the our representatives I will argue reflects a deeper ethical problem which predisposes it to demand deference to claims phrased in the language of group identity and experience and which, in consequence, threatens the stated goal of enhancing political inclusion and the wider project of facilitating democratic social transformation through democratic contestation and deliberation.

Impartiality and Public Inclusion

Deliberative democrats typically argue that majoritarian models of democracy wrongly present political decision-making as a form of private consumer choice. When decisions are collectively binding, citizens must accept that they have a duty to consider interests and arguments of all concerned (Elster, 1997). This requires them to distinguish between public and private reasons and to vote only for measures consonant with the former (Rawls, 1993, p. 217). Citizens who recognise the duty to deliberate in this way will be more sensitive to the
arguments of marginalized groups than those concerned only with maximising sectional gains. In effect, the device of public reason requires citizens to reason impartially about political matters.

It is suggested, however, that the politics of recognition require us to break with the notion of impartial deliberation and the model of the public sphere that goes with it. Young argues, for example, that a public sphere constituted by the ideal of impartiality mistakenly values detachment and universality over particular interests and identifications (Young, 1990, pp. 97-121). She claims that the ideal of the impartial citizen is fundamentally biased, taking the values and attributes of dominant groups as normative and those of marginalized groups as exceptional or deviant. Against this backdrop, the efforts of the marginalized to get a hearing for their claims will appear partial and inconsistent with civic altruism (Phillips, 1999, p.121). Consequently, we must abandon impartiality if we are to construct a fully inclusive public sphere which won’t delegitimise the claims of the marginalized or require them to leave their differences at the door as the price of admission to equal citizenship.

This means making group differences actually present in the public sphere by: providing resources to aid the self-organisation of disadvantaged groups; setting aside parliamentary seats for the representatives of marginalized groups; and instituting group vetoes on issues of central concern to these groups, e.g. giving women a veto on abortion law.¹ Young also argues that the political culture of our democracies should be more open to non-argumentative modes of
discourse, e.g. story telling, and should shun confrontational styles of interaction.ii Formal group representation will guarantee that representatives will be confronted with the specific claims of the marginalised which may otherwise be simply overlooked, or, at best, misidentified by well meaning but ill-informed representatives.iii

While it is obviously true that elites exploit the rhetoric of impartiality, it would be wrong to reject the norm for this reason. Indeed, the worry that the public sphere, as currently constituted, is biased against marginalized groups is itself premised on the idea that it ought to be impartial. It also looks as if the claim that impartiality’s difference-blindness necessarily suppresses ‘difference’ relies on a confusion between ‘partiality’ and ‘particularity’. Impartiality opposes the former but not the latter. The norm of impartiality only requires us to refrain from giving undue weight to our own interests in adjudicating claims. When confronted with competing claims the conscientious deliberator must attend closely to the particular features of the claims concerned in order to bring into focus their morally relevant features. It would be silly to suggest that impartialists do not recognise any obligation to attempt to understand the nature of the claims which confront them, nor are they committed solely to the rough and ready remedy of equal treatment. Critics may respond that ‘morally relevant features’ denotes claims which appeal to generalisable interests, revealing a bias in favour of the universal, but it is hard to see how such claims can consistently be pressed home without abandoning moral deliberation altogether. This is a
question to which we shall have to return below, however. In any case, the view that claims of justice must by definition appeal to general interests is not obviously implicated in demands for social uniformity.

What is really at issue is not whether the public deliberation should be impartial, but how can the public sphere be configured so as to ensure that the claims of the marginalised will be heard and receive impartial consideration? Young suggests that impartiality encourages elitist forms of decision-making, encouraging citizens to surrender their judgments to ‘impartial’ umpires. Deliberative democrats can agree that this is undesirable, as they favour more transparent and accountable decision-making procedures and, crucially, argue that we need to make citizens more deliberative. Instead of restricting deliberation to elites, deliberative democrats argue that the responsibility for deliberation must be dispersed throughout the citizenry and that in the final analysis democratic procedures themselves serve to umpire disputes (Gaus 1997, p111).

There are, however, strong currents within the politics of recognition which appear to run counter to this democratisation of deliberation, chiefly the suggestion that citizens defer to the authority of group representatives. Powerful support for this move comes from extreme versions of what Phillips calls the ‘politics of presence’ which insists that non-members are unable to properly understand the experiences of group members (Phillips, 1995). Closely related to this claim is the suggestion that multicultural democracy would be distinguished
by ‘moral deference’ to the marginalized (Jaggar, 1999, p. 323), and that it may be
‘offensive’ to seek argumentative support for their claims (Sanders, 1997, p. 354).
Young’s group veto proposal in particular, would enhance group authority to
the detriment of public deliberation by effectively ring-fencing certain issues as
‘private’.

Institutionalising group representation risks strengthening these counter-
deliberative tendencies by providing incentives for group representatives to
demand deference to claims phrased in the vocabulary of group recognition. If
this is to be the key mechanism for rendering the public sphere inclusive, then
the ‘differences’ presented to the public must inevitably undergo significant pre-
deliberative filtering and packaging prior to public consumption and may
drastically inhibit the expression of dissent from within the groups concerned
over and above its impact on deliberation more generally.

If the key institutional implication of the politics of recognition is formal
group representation, then we might suspect that the politics of recognition is
more concerned with symbolic rather than substantial inclusion. For deliberative
democrats, by contrast, political deliberation must be inclusive in the sense,
firstly, that all citizens must be, in some way, included in public deliberation, not
merely elites, whatever their composition, and secondly, in the sense that these
deliberations must themselves be maximally inclusive of relevant facts and
reasons. If this is our model of political inclusion then we must be concerned to
eliminate rather than to multiply additional filters on public deliberation. To the
extent that the politics of recognition would insulate groups from deliberative scrutiny, it is at odds with deliberative democracy. I will argue, however, that we can distinguish between the popular, difference-based, model of recognition, which I will call ‘authentic recognition’ and an alternative model of ‘egalitarian recognition’. The former underwrites innovations such as formal group representation, and runs counter to the ideal of deliberative democracy, while the latter, it will be suggested, is hostile to the protection of group identities and cultures and is, correspondingly, more in tune with the goals of deliberative democrats.

Two Models of Recognition

The key ethical idea driving the politics of authentic recognition is that it seeks to reverse the privilege accorded to universality by standard notions of equality and respect. These emphasise our common humanity and seek to derive a common set of rights and duties from abstract conceptions of persons as free and equal beings. It is argued that abstraction from our particular identities and circumstances inevitably treats those particularising facets of our identities, our gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, for example, as accidental to our humanity. To afford us respect only in virtue of those things we share with everyone, it is said, devalues and denigrates those particular features which may actually be essential to our sense of who we are. The politics of authentic recognition raises
the banner of particularity, demanding recognition of ourselves as black and/or female, not respect despite these features.

Charles Taylor traces the origin of a concern with our particularities and their investment with ‘authenticity’, to the break-up of feudalism, stressing the way in which our sense of self worth is dependent on others’ reactions to us (Taylor, 1994). Our identities, Taylor argues, have always been interdependent in this way, but only recently has this relationship been explicitly problematized. In the pre-modern-world everyone’s value was determined by an elaborate, rigid, and relatively uncontroversial status system. The modern erosion of this system has thrust upon us the weighty responsibility for determining our own worth.

If we could pursue our projects of self-construction in isolation from others, our task would be straightforward, but because self-hood is mediated by language and interaction with others, the success of our efforts will be dependent on their recognition. Where they fail to recognise us as we want to be recognised it will be difficult, if not impossibly costly, to maintain our chosen self-image. So important is social recognition to the achievement of my selfhood, Taylor argues, ‘a person, or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confusing or demeaning or contemptible pictures of themselves. Non-recognition, or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone is a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.’(Taylor 1994, p. 25)
When we choose only to recognise the universal in someone and neglect the particular features in which they have invested their authenticity, we risk inflicting precisely this sort of harm.

The ubiquity and importance of the struggle for recognition is undeniable, whether in the form of the struggle of the immigrant to be recognised as someone who ‘belongs’, or those of children to be recognised as independent adults. The basic model of selfhood as intersubjectively constructed is also clearly correct, but Taylor’s next move is not convincing, i.e. the claim that there is a strong contrast between the morality of universal respect and the demand for recognition of our particularity. Taking the *Social Contract* as his exemplar, Taylor suggests that Rousseau’s ban on particular associations in favour of universal, undifferentiated, respect sets the template for political modernity and underscores the potentially *totalitarian* nature of universalism (Taylor, 1994, p. 44).

In contrast to Taylor, I am going to suggest that instead of contrasting the ethics of recognition with the morality of equal respect, we should distinguish between two distinct understandings of recognition itself, one concerned with group difference and authenticity, and one which encompasses the morality of respect: ‘egalitarian’ recognition. The basis for this distinction is provided by Honneth’s threefold analysis of the concept of recognition which distinguishes between: recognition in the form of ‘love’ or ‘care’; recognition as respect; and recognition as esteem (Honneth 1992, pp.190-6). According to Honneth each of
these is essential to the integrity of the person, but for our purposes his analysis of the second, recognition as respect, is crucial. Honneth’s overall aim is to provide a distinctively normative orientation for Critical Theory and his starting point is a moral phenomenology of insult taking the view that our reactions to insult reveal fundamental features of our normative orientation to the world.

What is revealed is our expectation that we will be accorded recognition as full members of the moral community, i.e. as persons capable of being held accountable for our actions. Self-respect, then, relies on our normally being treated as an equal member of the community of moral agents (Honneth 1992, p.191). While the communitarian appropriation of ‘recognition’ treats the morality of rights in particular as fundamentally ‘atomist’ in its ontology, Honneth’s account reminds us that intersubjective recognition is basic to such a morality: to be a rights-bearer entails recognising others as moral agents capable of making claims upon you and capable of responding appropriately to any claims you make upon them. When one’s rights are violated, one is not merely deprived of the goods to which one has a claim, but rather one’s very status as someone with the authority to make and respond to moral claims is denied (Feinberg, 1980).

Self-esteem, which is associated with the third category of recognition, is best achieved when our particular mode of self-realisation is not normally exposed to social disapproval (Honneth 1992, p.191). One might choose to transpose the contrast between recognition as respect and recognition as esteem
directly onto the contrast between egalitarian and authentic recognition, but Honneth’s remarks on the latter suggest an alternative view. He acknowledges, of course, the fact that we encounter demands for ‘positive’ social evaluations of particular ethical projects, but argues that these make about as much sense as demands for friendship. While Taylor claims that the politics of recognition involves a departure from traditional egalitarian morality and politics, Honneth argues that for the most part, it remains within the ambit of egalitarianism, with many ostensibly radical claims for group recognition turning out, on closer inspection, to entail egalitarian arguments for non-discrimination which aim at securing universal rights for individual group members.

The implication here is that we cannot demand the positive or even equal valuation of our particular identities and ethical projects, because this would violate the freedom of others to make evaluative judgements. This, in turn suggests that, while there will always be those who demand that the state positively endorse their particular way of life, it will be impossible for the state to do so without adopting a sectarian standpoint which denies the freedom of its citizens to adopt dissenting views. What a state pursuing a politics of egalitarian recognition can offer, by contrast, is the removal of inequalities which unfairly restrict the freedom of persons to seek social endorsement of their identities and projects.

Taylor overlooks the vital advance involved in introducing universal respect into societies previously dominated by questions of status: where we
have the possibility of respecting others as persons, without esteeming their particularities, we acquire the possibility of tolerance, which enables us to disapprove of a practice or practices and the social identity implicated therein without thereby excising those concerned from the community or moral agents (Honneth 1995, p.111). By contrast, the politics of authentic recognition demands of us that we endorse particular identities, regardless of misgivings we may have about them, which clearly diminishes our freedom to form our own view of the matter. What’s more, the suggestion that we swap respect for recognition promotes a dangerous confusion between respect and endorsement, such that we may be led to feel that we must ‘celebrate’ identities which might more properly be candidates for toleration. Clearly we need a more nuanced politics of recognition than that offered by the politics of authentic recognition which, it will be suggested, is not only politically, but also ethically and morally problematic.

Pluralism and Authentic Recognition

While the ethics of authentic recognition appears to represent a pluralizing tendency in contrast to the totalitarianism of universalism, at root it reflects a deep ambivalence to ‘difference’. By placing such a high value on securing agreement between other’s judgements of one’s value and one’s own, the ethics of authentic recognition pursues a totalising agenda in the guise of promoting pluralism.
When we seek recognition for ourselves in the eyes of others what we hope to find is not something other, but something familiar – to find ourselves in others. Their ‘recognition’ is in fact our own recognition of ourselves, reflected back to us in their reactions. What we are seeking is confirmation of our self-evaluation and when it is not forthcoming it can be deeply unsettling, raising the possibility that our self-understanding is merely a private fantasy. There are two obvious ways to integrate self and social evaluations: (1) to revise our self-evaluation, or (2) to seek to revise the ‘mistaken’ social evaluation. If we grant the claim that non-recognition may be harmful, then it is plausible that the imperative to avoid this harm may prompt us to project our shock and anger at apparent non-recognition outwards, in the form of a corrosive resentment against the wilful refusal of others to accord us the recognition we seek (Connolly, 1991).

The demand for recognition of my particularities risks becoming implicated in a dangerous narcissism, for if my overriding concern is to see myself mirrored in the reactions of others, then the extent to which I am genuinely engaging with them as others, i.e. as independent centres of thought and agency, is thrown into question. The complex of narcissism and resentment lurking within the politics of authentic recognition would replace the plurality of standpoints we encounter in the world with a single point of view: my own. In this way the potential for friction between self and others which is inevitable in social life is erased, as the possibilities for encountering any checks on my self-assertion are removed and replaced by a frictionless, transparent world in which
my own standpoint is the only view I encounter. A politics of authentic recognition, divorced from respect for others’ right to form diverging judgments, offers us a fantasy of social transparency driven by the demand for total control over my self-understanding.\textsuperscript{x}

An ethically more attractive relationship to social diversity might draw on elements of philosophical hermeneutics. On this view the essence of our finite nature is that we are situated beings endowed with particular horizons within which we may encounter others. These encounters may enlarge and transform our particular perspectives on the world, but crucially, while we can alter our horizons, we cannot overcome the phenomenon of the horizon itself. Where the politics of authentic recognition would erase these limits, the hermeneutic self would explore and transform their particular configurations. As Gadamer suggests, the phenomenon of finitude opens us to the world rather than hindering our engagement with it, and were it to be recognised as a permanent feature of humanity it would in fact sustain respect for others as differently situated beings with perspectives of their own (Gadamer, 1979, p.405). Accepting that there may be legitimate limits to our control of our identities and that consequently recognition failures are inevitable is a precondition of respecting pluralism. We can only have guarantees that we will receive the recognition we seek if we eliminate diversity of perspective. Toleration of a certain degree of recognition failure is the price we must pay if we are to inhabit a heterogeneous social world and avoid a politics of identity mired in social resentment.
Dissenting judgements turn out to be a serious problem for the ethics of authentic recognition which supposes that it is always best to reintegrate diverging views and thereby avoid the dreadful harm of misrecognition. It is clear that the total absence of recognition would be a bad thing: the world would be a disturbingly unpredictable environment without significant accord in our judgments, but from a normative standpoint the ethics of authentic recognition are woefully underdeveloped. It offers us guidance neither on how we ought to reintegrate diverging judgements nor on the proper limits on integration. An egalitarian politics of recognition, by contrast, seeks agreement solely on the equal moral standing of persons, not on value of their particular social identities and projects, and can draw upon the criterion of equal respect to direct our moral and political deliberations.

On this view, firstly, diverging views are a product of the free use of reason, and we must respect the right of others to form such views, regardless of their potential to expose us to recognition failure. Secondly, the criterion of equal respect ought to determine who, if anyone is obliged to undertake any revision of social identities and practices when such failures occur, i.e. the recognition seeker, or the respondent. Thirdly, the pursuit of egalitarian recognition will, in some circumstances, require us to withhold recognition from certain social identities, or aspects of those identities, i.e. not simply to hold them in low
esteem, but sometimes to subject them to legal sanction. In encouraging
deliberation about identity-based claims rather than demanding a presumption
of deference, the politics of egalitarian recognition advances deliberative
democratic objectives: the democratisation of political judgement and the pursuit
of social justice through democratic politics.

Our obligation to deliberate about claims phrased in the language of
culture and identity is obscured by a complex of assumptions implicated in the
politics of authentic recognition, assumptions about the nature of social identity,
the badness of misrecognition, and the role of the state in securing recognition.
With respect to the badness of misrecognition the key problem is the vagueness
of the claim that this is a serious harm to others. Rorty even suggests that to
redescribe others in terms other than those they have themselves chosen is not
merely harmful but actually evidences cruelty (Rorty, 1989, p. 89). That
‘misrecognition’ is unwelcome is certain, but it does not follow that we ought
always to avoid inflicting this harm, nor even that the discomfort of
misrecognition is always a harm. Just as we can agree that punishment in always
bad, it does not follow that to inflict it is therefore wrong.

To see how we may be obliged to withhold recognition from certain
persons, or aspects of their self-presentation, we need only reflect upon the
complex interaction of social identities. Personal identities are not only multi-
layered – an individual may find themselves at the intersection of a number of
social identities, gender, sexuality, class, etc. but may interact such that the
content of certain social identities is given by their hierarchical relationship to others. ‘Difference’ may itself be a product of inequality. Thus it is not simply the case that identities are constituted by their place within a system of differences, but that these differences themselves are often hierarchical, such that one term is treated as lesser than the other, a deviation or lack, and so on. Certain social identities are constituted by the fact that their bearers stand in relations of superiority or subordination to others, chauvinist versions of masculinity, for example, being possible to sustain only on the assumption that those who subscribe to them view themselves as superior to women, gay men, etc. Identities, therefore, should not be taken as ‘givens’ but rather as candidates for moral scrutiny and potential revision.

When the politics of recognition is conceived as a matter of liberation from an oppressive universalism, the remedy appears obvious: that the state grant public recognition of ‘difference’, but this suggests that the struggle for recognition involves a simple transaction between state and oppressed group, whereas the reality is more complex and again calls for a more critical stance with respect to particular social identities. Arguably the problem of escaping oppressive forms of social recognition is typically one of liberation from particular forms of ‘recognition’, a process which demands the critical scrutiny of social relations and in the attempt to transform these relations, the withholding of recognition from those aspects of social identities implicated in inequality.

What is involved here is not simply a transaction between an oppressed
group and the state, but rather a relation between oppressor, oppressed, and the state. This is not to suggest that the state is ‘neutral’ in such struggles, but only to underline the complexity of the relations involved in an egalitarian politics of recognition. The ‘political’ recognition of difference is rather a matter of making it easier for marginalized groups to recruit the power of the state to address oppressive social relations. What is missing from the ‘politics of recognition’ however is explicit acknowledgement of the triangular nature of the relationship and of the often zero-sum character of struggles for recognition, in which the process by which some gain recognition will typically involve losses for others. Talk of group difference as a political ‘resource’, for example, suggests a rosy picture of good will and social cooperation which obscures the role of real conflict in struggles for recognition (Young, 2000, p. 81).

Justice requires that those who are implicated in inequality should suffer a loss of recognition at least in respect of those facets of their social identities which are so implicated. The ‘local’ recognition failures entailed by an egalitarian politics of recognition are consistent nonetheless with recognition of those concerned as moral agents capable of taking responsibility for their actions and social identities. This responsibility for self can be overlooked if we allow ourselves to be dazzled by the fact that social identities are unchosen intersubjective constructions. The alleged contrast between the politics of ‘ideas’ and the politics of ‘presence’ relies on the assumption that identities are simply brute facts, devoid of cognitive and normative content. Naturally, we don’t want
to see anyone unfairly disadvantaged on account of who they are but equally, we mustn’t fall into the trap of supposing that social identities are disqualified as objects of moral appraisal. Identities are formed intersubjectively, not simply conferred from without and while they may often latch onto physiological markers such as sex of colour, they are not exhausted by such indicators, but are rather constituted by a mass of beliefs about appropriate behaviour, entitlement, obligation, etc. The normative content of social identities, and the historical narratives which sustain them, are proper objects of moral scrutiny and those who inhabit these identities can reasonably be held responsible for reflecting upon them and revising them accordingly. The struggle for recognition does not lie outside the morality of respect, but is rather carried on in the vocabulary of moral appraisal provided by it. Claims for recognition call upon us to deliberate and to judge, something obscured by suggesting that we must always strive to avoid ‘misrecognition’ i.e. that we must accede to demands for endorsement of a particular identity.

Finally, we might question the ‘political’ nature of the politics of recognition to the extent that it appears to rest on a naïve understanding of the power struggles involved in processes of identity formation and in particular the internal politics of group formation. While as individuals we encounter the world ready-made, it doesn’t follow that social ‘groups’ are natural features of the political landscape. Rather, particular identifiers have to be invested with significance by social actors, and made to serve as the basis for group
mobilisation by cultural and political entrepreneurs who encourage potential members to view certain sets of shared characteristic as the basis for political action (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). It requires active politicisation to transform a set of individuals who fall objectively into the class of all persons with feature X into a self-conscious ‘group’. This is not in itself particularly sinister: most people, most of the time, are not politically active, and issues and identities are invariably politicised by some subset of those affected, but if we are concerned to construct a maximally inclusive public sphere in which to criticise and transform issues and identities, we cannot ignore the hard facts about the political dynamics of group identity.

It would be irresponsible to overlook the way that, even in emancipatory projects, the demands of constituting individuals as a group and sustaining a collective political identity can inhibit internal diversity and limit the opportunities of group members to work out their own identities (Benhabib 2002, p.68; Fraser 2003, p.76). The politicisation of certain identities typically results in the foregrounding of certain identifications, e.g. religious, or national, at the expense of others, such that individuals find themselves confronted by forms of ‘recognition’ which compel them to view themselves through this particular lens, regardless of their personal attitude to the identity in question. From the point of view of the individuals concerned, a society which ‘recognises’ one facet of their identity to the exclusion of others can be every bit as oppressive as a society that insists on wholesale cultural assimilation, and involves precisely the sort of
distorting abstraction with which moral universalism is charged. What is denied, in each case, is the right of the individual to become the author of her own identity, i.e. to narrate and negotiate her own version of her self. This is made all the more difficult to the extent that demands for official recognition of group identities bring into play a politics of authenticity in which group members come under pressure to conform to a particular view of the group’s identity and its attendant practices, on pain of having their views branded as ‘inauthentic’, thereby de-legitimising them and excusing members and non-members alike from their obligation to include them in their deliberations. Politicisation requires group solidarity and the resulting imperative to police group boundaries inevitably produces sharper, more exclusive, membership criteria. The dangers here are two-fold: there is a cost to personal freedom, but also to the heterogeneity of the public sphere itself.

Inclusive deliberation should frustrate elite efforts to strategically manipulate decision-making by forcing more open deliberation and thereby disaggregating complex issues (Dryzek, 2000, p. 40-1). State recognition of group difference in the form of formally corporatist systems of representation may appear to strengthen inclusivity, but will set in motion a politics of authenticity which will filter out dissenting perspectives as ‘inauthentic’ and ‘unrepresentative’. Inclusive deliberation is best served by institutions which will make it easier to unseat elite hegemonies, not by institutions which will entrench the rule of a new elite of identity-entrepreneurs.
Whether there is any affinity between the politics of recognition and deliberative democracy will depend entirely on which model of the politics of recognition one has in mind: authentic or egalitarian recognition. The former throws up obstacles to open and inclusive deliberation by demanding deference from non-group members and de-legitimising dissenting voices from within groups, but the latter, which demands a socially transformative politics aimed at the elimination of domination, harmonises well with the ideal of deliberative democracy. This is true on the one hand insofar as deliberative democratic procedures are designed to facilitate such a politics, and, on the other hand, deliberative politics will be more effective to the extent that this politics sustains a variety of dissenting, critical voices which can be brought to bear on policy formation. This view of the relationship between a politics of recognition and deliberative politics does however, calls for a more radical conception of political inclusion than that proposed in the name of the politics of authentic recognition, one that spills out over the bounds of formal parliamentary politics and into the wider society.

To rethink inclusion, we must, of course clarify and revise our notions of the ‘public’. The attempt to distinguish between public and private (or non-public) spheres has traditionally attracted criticism on the grounds that it insulates unjust practices from public scrutiny and regulation but this problem
clearly only arises with one attempts to designate whole areas of social life as either public or private in their totality (Pateman 1987). The two uses of ‘public’ employed within deliberative democratic theory are not designed to frustrate the sort of transformative social criticism which a politics of egalitarian recognition requires. Firstly, there is a normative distinction between types of reason: those which others may reasonably endorse as the basis for collectively binding decisions, and those which cannot serve as such a basis as they rest on considerations which are the subject of reasonable disagreement (Rawls 1993). Secondly, there is a sociological distinction between the formal parliamentary public sphere, and the informal public sphere, or more properly spheres, as this region is thought of as composed of a plurality of publics overlapping and abutting one another, rather than as a unitary public idealised perhaps in the ancient Greek *agora* a distinction which is essential to the two-track model of deliberative democracy endorsed here (Fraser 1997; Habermas 1996). According to this model, if citizens are to enjoy political autonomy, then democratic institutions must ensure that communication flows freely between these publics, the realisation of democracy not being confined to the formal parliamentary sphere alone.

The normative distinction aims to preserve personal autonomy without forestalling public deliberation by declaring certain practices to be private at the outset. Everything is a potential topic for public deliberation, although the conception of public reason itself ensures that not everything may be legitimately
subject to legal sanction (Cohen, 1997, p. 75). The sociological distinction also works in favour of the social contestation as the informal public plays a vital role in serving as a context of *discovery* in which social criticism can serve to problematize social practices and institutions and in so doing make them a theme for deliberation within the formal public sphere (Habermas, 1996, p. 307). On this two-track model of deliberative politics, inclusivity cannot be thought of purely in terms of systems of parliamentary representation. Deliberative democratic practice must be inclusive firstly through ensuring equal participation in the deliberations of informal publics and secondly, through ensuring that the lines of communication between formal and informal publics are kept open despite the attempts of elites to control them.

This understanding of the public and the normative considerations contained in the ideas of public reason and egalitarian recognition are to be sharply distinguished from another model of the public, the republican-assimilationist model represented by the French notion of ‘*laïcité*’. The latter clearly inhibits the public expression of group differences in order to preserve civic solidarity, as the recent struggles over the rights of Muslim schoolgirls to wear headscarves in French schools amply illustrates (Galeotti 2002). Defenders of authentic recognition like Taylor would claim that this policy of public assimilation stems directly from the morality of equal respect, but this seems to rely on a curiously blinkered notion of respect and a resolute determination to ignore the influence of classical republican notions of virtue and interest upon
this model of citizenship and the public sphere. While the republican-assimilationist model of the public seeks to eliminate public expressions of group difference, the differentiated model of overlapping publics outlined above, insists that public reasoning appeal to generalisable arguments, to be sure, but makes no demands with respect to particular social identities in the informal public spheres, save that the freedom of persons to author their own lives be respected. On this view, the French state’s ban on the wearing of Muslim headscarves represents a significant denial of individual civil rights and a denial, therefore, of egalitarian recognition, i.e. respect. As this example suggests, the demand for a more heterogeneous public sphere is typically a demand relating to the visibility of minority groups in the informal public sphere of ordinary social life (Galeotti, 2002, p. 72). Protecting the freedom of members of such groups to lead publicly visible lives is essentially a matter, not of seeking various sorts of state endorsement of their particular identities, but rather of ensuring that the state guarantee egalitarian recognition by defending their civil rights.

Far from requiring a homogenous public sphere, when the state relates to its citizens primarily in the mode of respect for their rights to freedom and equality it protects the conditions under which social difference can flourish in the informal public sphere. Where people fear for their safety or livelihood were they to express their particular cultural, personal, or political affiliations they are not free to author their own lives and seek recognition/endorsement for the identities they seek to inhabit. Our problem is not that we need to alter the way
in which the state relates to its citizens, to switch from respect to ‘recognition’, but that we need to do more to ensure that citizens’ civil rights are effectively protected so that they may be free to seek recognition for their particular authentic selves. There is, then, a subtle interconnection between recognition as respect and the more particular focus of recognition as esteem: the freedom to seek the latter depends on the state guaranteeing the former.

The protection of essentially negative rights not only secures for citizens the freedom to seek recognition/esteem from particular audiences for their particular features, but is also necessary if citizens are to enjoy political autonomy. This is not all that is required however, and if we are to have an inclusive deliberative politics, extending across formal and informal publics then positive measures are certainly required, albeit not those most readily associated with the ‘politics of recognition’. The suggestion that resources be provided to aid disadvantaged groups to organise themselves politically is particularly pertinent (Fraser, 1997; Young, 1990, p. 184). Measures to facilitate self-organisation should enhance diversity by encouraging the emergence and flourishing of a variety of campaign groups and political parties, where the dynamics of special representation, by contrast, favour reductions in the diversity of political culture (Lijphart, 1995).

Unfortunately, most discussions of the need to recognise cultural pluralism are expressed in the conservative idiom of cultural protection, a result, no doubt, of the way that the position of indigenous peoples in modern states
has come to serve as a template for political theorists. This conservatism is softened somewhat by the argument from autonomy (Kymlicka, 1989, pp. 165-7) and, in addition, a suitably formal conception of autonomy may temper comprehensive liberal objections to thick group identities (Dworkin 1988). However, Kymlicka’s context of choice argument does not necessarily license cultural protectionism as he appears to think, because strictly speaking it merely affirms the need for cultural diversity (Moore, 2001, p. 54). Instead of arguing for a conservative cultural policy which aims at maintaining a relatively limited range of cultural forms and which can so easily become a resource for the anti-deliberative exploitation of notions of authenticity, a more pluralist cultural policy is indicated, one which would afford citizens the opportunity to hybridise existing cultural forms, creating new possibilities of being and identification (Bhabha, 1994).

A truly egalitarian cultural policy which was committed to protecting citizens’ rights to self-authorship would involve the attempt to ensure equal access to the means of cultural production, affording citizens the opportunity to experiment with a variety of cultural forms, but also breaking up media monopolies which enable the wealthy to exert undue influence on contemporary culture. Cultural conservatives may not like the results, but they would have no legitimate complaint if the production of cultural forms were undertaken on the basis of equality. The defence of the contexts in which identities are formed and transformed does not entail the adoption of a protectionist multiculturalism, but
rather protection of the fluidity of the process of seeking recognition/endorsement by neutralising the effects of inequalities of power upon the informal public sphere.

Adopting a cultural policy of fostering ongoing pluralisation as opposed to one of cultural protectionism is clearly attractive if we value personal autonomy. But it is also important if we hope to construct an inclusive deliberative democracy which will facilitate democratic social transformation. The two-track model of democracy doesn’t establish a cordon sanitaire between civil society and parliamentary politics but rather treats these as two sorts of public, and each as sites of political contestation. If anything, the informal public assumes greater significance when its role in thematising political problems is taken into account. If political deliberation is to be inclusive, then it must be inclusive across both formal and informal publics and we must pay particular attention to strengthening the capacities of and opportunities for members of marginalised groups to engage in contesting and problematizing social practices and identities. If dissenting voices are stifled in the informal public sphere because a culture of deference has been allowed to take hold, or simply through unequal access to opportunities and resources required for communication and organisation, then formal political deliberation cannot be effective, regardless of who our representatives happen to be.

If the project of making deliberative democracy more inclusive is interpreted narrowly as that of making representative bodies more socially
inclusive, the central role of the informal public as the generator of problems and initiator of policy deliberation will be overlooked. Of course, there are clear political advantages to adopting the narrow view: it’s relatively easy to see how the representative bodies might be reformed and to gauge the impact of any reforms, while the attempt to enhance the capacity of marginalised groups to contest unjust social practices in the informal public seems to involve a dauntingly wide range of problems. This is not to replay the old social justice vs. parliamentary politics standoff: rather it is simply a plea for a more comprehensive view of what is entailed in the construction of inclusive, deliberative democratic institutionsxvi.

We must not only take care to combat those tendencies to diminish the capacity of the informal public sphere to problematize social practices, e.g. the politics of authentic recognition, but we must also attend to the nature of the links between formal and informal publics: a powerful engine is no use unless we are able to engage the gears (Scheuerman 2002). As it stands the only formal link between formal and informal public is that provided by the machinery for periodically electing representatives, which scarcely provides an effective conduit for ongoing communication and deliberation across formal and informal publics. The absence of any institutional means for encouraging deliberative exchanges between these spheres allows the mass media to drown out dissenting voices from without the parliamentary village, save for those rare instances when public protest, whether through weight of numbers or the use of theatrical
stunts, manages to intrude on the conversation of the news media and professional politicians. In the absence of adequate institutional conduits between voters and the parliamentary public sphere we should not be surprised to find rising levels of voter apathy or outright hostility toward professional politicians combined with a concern for political issues.

The politics of authentic recognition is not wholly insensitive to this problem: insisting on representation by those who share an identity with the groups they represent aims at symbolic recognition, but is also motivated by the hope that these shared identities will themselves provide conduits for concerns otherwise excluded from formal deliberation (Phillips 1995, p.158). It has been argued here, however, that not only must this inevitably foreground counter-deliberative issues of credibility and authenticity, but it is also a poor substitute for formal deliberative mechanisms, for on this view a shared identity may actually take the place of formal consultation with group members. The group representative, endowed with the relevant identity and experience need only look inside her own heart to discern what her people need... Far from providing a conduit, the shared identity model of representation appears to render the formal mechanisms for consultation and deliberation redundant.

A more robust way to ensure communication between voters and their representatives would be to require representatives to run regular deliberative exercises in their constituencies, say every six months at least. Existing proposals for the use of deliberative polling either envisage it as an
element of one-off consultation procedures for public projects of various sorts, or as a preliminary to elections, but not as a mechanism for cultivating ongoing communication between voters and their representatives (Fishkin 1991). Perhaps this is because we are still too much in the grip of a Burkean, elitist, model of representation, which envisages voters as having entirely contracted out their deliberative responsibilities to their representative for his entire period of office: we may deliberate about our choice, but after that, deliberation becomes the sole concern of the representative. The idea is not, of course, to turn representatives into delegates, but only to provide an institutional context in which ideas and arguments can flow, on both directions, between formal and informal spheres. Unlike existing sorts of constituency work which require the representative to function as a glorified social worker, these periodic deliberation days would encourage those involved to reinterpret private discontents as matters of common concern and political significance (Fishkin 2003). The politicians too, may find that they are afforded greater freedom to explore issues of public policy when deliberations are not reduced to media interrogation or party acrimony. This is by no means a panacea, but only an indication of what a more expansive view of political deliberation might look like. We might well be sceptical of the prospect of rendering parliamentary chambers more deliberative when party discipline too often effectively relieves representatives of their deliberative responsibilities, but rather than abandon the ideal, we should rather seek to
create new sites in which potentially transformative deliberations might take place.

Finally, although this analysis suggests that altering the composition of representative bodies should not be our primary concern neither should we be content with their current configuration. As mentioned at the outset, arguments from equal opportunity, while unsatisfactory insofar as they treat representation on a par with private occupations, do have some force. Measures to equalise opportunities in this sphere may not automatically enhance political inclusiveness or improve the quality of political deliberation, but whereas the device of special representation may be positively harmful in these respects, measures such as the introduction of gender quotas for party candidates do not make concessions to the politics of authenticity. While this device may often be bundled together with special representation, it differs in that no common group standpoint is assumed as women may seek to become candidates right across the political spectrum, nor will such measures create institutional incentives to fabricate an authentic ‘women’s perspective’. The argument from equal opportunity carries no costs for political deliberation, so we may have no qualms about pocketing any benefits which it may produce in terms of increasing social diversity or improving the range and quality of deliberation, even if gains in this last respect turn out to be negligible.

Another measure which may increase the heterogeneity of representative bodies without costs to deliberation is that of selection by lottery, which has the
advantage that every citizen has themselves an equal likelihood of being selected to participate in parliamentary politics. As such it would represent a gain in the inclusiveness of democratic politics, and may enhance deliberation by breaking up the common-sense of embedded policy elites. While we would not want to allow lottery to take the place of elections: apart from anything else, these allow voters to hold their representatives to account, however imperfectly, but it might be a more attractive way of composing an upper house than reliance on heredity or governmental patronage. An upper chamber composed of several cohorts of members, rotating out of service every six months or so would, if jury service is anything to go by, go some way towards correcting the class imbalance in our representative bodies.

Conclusion

I have been arguing that we should reject the claim that the politics of recognition is a natural element of deliberative democracy. While both are ostensibly pluralist and inclusive in outlook, the politics of recognition favours a static, corporatist pluralism of ‘cultural’ group, while deliberative democracy, as presented here, can only thrive in the context of a dynamic, contestatory pluralism of dissenting voices which enriches public deliberation by exposing hegemonic orthodoxies to challenge both from within and without. While I have concentrated on the proposal for special group representation, the primary contribution of recognition theorists to debates about the reform of democratic
institutions, I have also sought to expose the ethical weaknesses of the politics of recognition and in particular its underlying hostility to dissenting interpretations of personal and collective identities. This view can only have a constraining influence on public deliberation and the political culture of deliberative democracy more widely. Ironically, while the politics of recognition proclaims the need to render the public sphere more pluralist, on closer inspection it is effectively seeking to ‘refeudalise’ the public sphere, by privatising questions of cultural and identity and thereby insulating them from public scrutiny and challenge (Habermas 1989).

This is not to say that the concerns of recognition theorists should be rejected in their entirety, but rather that we should adopt a more nuanced view of the politics of recognition than that which is currently dominant, a view which centres on an implausible contrast between respect and recognition and an unhelpfully vague notion of the ‘public’. The freedom to seek social approval for one’s particular projects, collective or otherwise, is a freedom which should be respected, but acknowledging the value of this freedom ought not commit us to endorsing a stultifying political corporatism. A genuinely plural and inclusive public sphere is indispensable if we want to strengthen the deliberative quality of our democratic institutions and facilitate democratic social transformation, but if we are to achieve these aims then we may find that the politics of authentic recognition is an obstacle in our path rather than a beacon showing us the way.
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i (Young, 1990, p. 184) She now qualifies her support for special representation as a measure to be adopted only as a last resort, suggesting that she doesn’t believe that groups have a right to such representation (Young, 2000, p. 150).

ii Young argues that we should make space for ‘greeting’, rhetoric, and narrative although these should not take the place of argument. Recently, she has argued for the value of political confrontation, although as a supplement to, not an element of, deliberation (Young, 2000, p. 56).

iii Deliberative democrats are, of course, concerned to correct the informational deficits which bedevil political deliberation. Fishkin’s deliberative polling device aims to correct errors by supplying potential checks on private deliberation through the collective airing of arguments and by exposing us to unfamiliar perspectives (Fishkin 2003; Fishkin 1991).

iv O’Neill points out that particularising descriptions are also abstractions (O’Neill, 1996, p. 40).

v This line of thought, inspired by Strawson’s Freedom & Resentment is also pursued by Habermas (Habermas 1990).

vi This demand refers to something which is the ‘result of a process of judgment that escapes our control, just as sympathy or affection does.’ (Honneth 2003, p.168).

vii (Honneth 2003, pp.163-6). Nancy Fraser argues for a twin track approach to equality which balances concerns with redistribution and recognition charges Honneth with ‘culturalist’
reductionism’. (Fraser 2003, p.34) While pluralists will not be drawn to Honneth’s essentially perfectionist account of justice, his account of the politics of recognition does have the virtue of proceeding directly from normative considerations, while Fraser, by contrast, swings between a social-theoretical account of the relationship between class and the ‘new’ social movements and normative argument. The attempt to connect both questions leads her to misidentify Honneth’s aims, which are not primarily to do with the analysis of social movements at all, still less with offering a cultural reductionist account of social change. While she may be right to suppose that a theory of justice ought to rest on deontological considerations rather than on the sort of philosophical anthropology proposed by Honneth, Fraser wholly overlooks the way in which traditional egalitarian concerns are embedded within Honneth’s account of recognition as respect. This is ironic given that this has to be the premise of the sort of deontological theory she desires.

viii Proponents of ‘recognition’ will typically deny that they mean to endorse repugnant identities, e.g. those of sectarian or racist groups, but this clearly calls for more elaborate theoretical resources than those offered by authentic recognition alone.

ix This ambivalence is neatly expressed in the title of Spinner-Halev’s ‘Surviving Diversity’ [my emphasis] (Spinner-Halev, 2000).

x In Adorno’s jargon, the unqualified demand for recognition would be said to constitute an example of ‘identity thinking’ which permits no other to escape its grasp (Adorno 1990).

xi Appiah worries about identities becoming too ‘tightly scripted’ (Appiah, 1994, p. 163).

xii Patricia Hill Collins argues that there is a distinctive black feminist standpoint which its own epistemic standards which grant credibility primary importance. This and other versions of feminist standpoint theory offer us a clear vision of the dynamics of a more group centred politics were it to take hold. (Collins 1990, pp.217-9).

xiii As Pettit points out, the central idea of public reason is that of avoiding subjecting one’s fellow citizens to arbitrary rule and thus it is a natural ally of the wider republican aim of eliminating
domination from social relations, i.e. exposure to the possibility of arbitrary interference (Pettit 2003). See also Cohen’s discussion of the elimination of accommodationist preferences as a key feature of the deliberative project (Cohen 1997).

xiv As Shue argues, we should not think of the protection of negative rights as merely entailing non-interference from the state: positive measures may often be required (Shue 1980).

xv Kymlicka’s initial insight was not that the US model of inclusion was universally ill-suited to assessing the position of ethnic minorities, but that it didn’t capture what was at stake in Canada. Subsequently, the Canadian model has come to dominate all discussion of these issues (Kymlicka, 1989, p. 142).

xvi Phillips rightly argues that democratic reform is inextricably linked to the project to social justice (Phillips 1999).

xvii Anne Phillips, for example, rejects special group representation in favour of devices of this sort. (Phillips 1995, pp.54-6).

Notes


