

The Great War of Recognition

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SAID BRUNO LATOUR: 'we might be leaving the time of time – successions and revolutions – and entering a very different time/space: that of coexistence'. The type of change that it is hoped will sweep clean the lumber and mess from the social site for the eager land-developers to start work on it from scratch is no longer on the cards in our time/space of 'liquid modernity'.¹ There is more change these days than ever before – but (as Milan Kundera observed) change nowadays is as disorderly as the state of affairs which it is meant to replace and which has prompted it in the first place. Things today are moving sideways, aslant or across rather than forward, often backward, but as a rule the movers are unsure of their direction and the nature of successive steps is hotly contested. Changes happen all over the place and all the time – sometimes converging, some other times diverging. One change starts before another has been completed and, most importantly, the sediments and imprints of one change are not wiped clean or erased before another change starts to scatter its own. In short – forms of life do not *succeed* each other: they settle aside each other, clash and mix, crowd together in the same time/space and are bound to do so for a long time to come. 'There is still an arrow of time', says Latour, 'but it no longer goes from slavery to freedom, it goes from entanglement to more entanglement.' Like before (perhaps more than ever before), the 'great simplification', re-making the world to order, is a dream dreamt by many, but more than ever before it looks like a pipe-dream. Variety of life-forms is here to stay. And so is the imperative of their coexistence.

Coexistence comes in many shapes and colours. One of these shapes – a basic one in fact (as Georg Simmel explained well before most sociologists noted that there was something to explain) – is *confrontation and strife*. Conflict is the birth-act of coexistence (since coexistence is a state that needs to be born daily anew, to speak of a birth-*process* rather than *act* would be more to the point). Conflict means *engagement*, and it is in the course of

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hostile confrontations and struggle that *Weltanschauungen*, values, ideals and preferences are first set against each other, compared, scrutinized, criticized, tested, valued or de-valued. Conflict lifts a mere 'entanglement' to the level of mutual engagement and so triggers the protracted, convoluted and contorted process of getting to know each other, coming to terms with each other, striking a bargain, seeking and finding a *modus vivendi* or rather *coexistendi*. Without conflict, no engagement. Without engagement, no hope for coexistence.

Conflict, I suggest, is in the 'liquid stage' of modernity the prevalent form of coexistence (this stage, together with the preceding 'solid' stage of modernity, I described more fully in Bauman, 2000). No longer can it be treated as a temporary irritant – a hiccup of an imperfectly modernized state of affairs and a hurdle to be leaped over or kicked out of the way by more modernization. It would not be proper to dismiss it as a symptom of backwardness even if the meaning of 'backwardness' were not itself the focus of a most hectic and fiery of conflicts. The growing volume and intensity of local and segmental conflicts cannot be played down as the feature of 'the state of transition' that leads to something variously (but invariably wrongly) called 'global culture', 'global society', or even (wistfully and romantically) 'global community'. It should be seen instead as a permanent, perhaps constitutive, attribute of a fast globalizing 'liquid modern' world – its staple and massive product rather than a side-effect of a preliminary, yet unfinished but finite and transient stage of globalization. Just as continuous (obsessive and unstoppable) modernization is not a process leading to modernity, but the substance of modernity itself, so the incessant and permanently unfinished *globalization* is the essence of the new *globality* of human condition.

That 'globality', to deploy Norbert Elias's terms, means no more but no less either than the presence of a 'global figuration': the network of dependencies, in which human thought and action are entangled, has extended to encompass the whole of the planet and to reach every nook and cranny, however remote and sheltered. 'Global figuration' means the ubiquity of 'butterfly effects': the consequences of a thoroughly local event may well reverberate throughout the planet. Actions, as before, have local (and localizable) origins, but now they have also global repercussions: it is only at their own peril that the actors fail to reckon with factors remote from the locality in which their own actions have been begotten and in which their designs are inscribed. What 'globality' does *not* mean, however (thus far at any rate), is the emergence or the imminence of a comparable global totality in other dimensions of human existence, notably political and cultural. On the contrary, the 'incompleteness', the one-dimensionality of the global figuration, the absence of the overlapping/complementing/integrating political and cultural networks of a matching size and potency is the most prominent, and perhaps the most consequential, trait of 'globality'. In his widely debated article for *Die Zeit* of 16 April 1999, dedicated to the NATO decision to bomb Yugoslavia, Jürgen Habermas pointed out that, in the absence of any binding and authoritative code of 'global law', actors can only refer to their

utterly subjective and so inherently questionable intuitions of what is a proper way to act and react to other actors' actions.

There may be something like a global trade-and-finance system in the making, but there are few if any signs of anything approximating a global political, legal, military or cultural system. It may be argued that this striking imbalance is a question of time-lag or 'relative retardation' of the global 'superstructure', but equally strong or stronger arguments can be advanced for the supposition that the imbalance or the absence of coordination in question is an integral and potentially permanent feature of globality – at least in its current economy-led, and thus far the only known and practised, form.

In the 'solid stage' of modernity the actions classified as 'economic' took place inside the political and cultural cocoon of the nation-state, simultaneously a greenhouse and an internment camp. All the factors of economic activity having been similarly confined, 'solid modernity' was an era of *mutual* dependency, mutual engagement, production and servicing of *mutually* binding and durable bonds. The defining trait of 'liquid modernity' is, on the contrary, *dis*-engagement. It is a time when economics, or rather its driving and propulsive forces, break free from the (obligingly dismantled from inside) carapace of politics and culture and accelerate beyond the slowing-down, let alone the catching-up capacity of state institutions (to use Manuel Castells's apt expression – new global powers flow away from politics which remains as grounded and territorially confined as before). Modernity started from the disengagement and separation of business from the household (and so, obliquely, the emancipation of business from ethical constraints). It has led to the disengagement and separation of business from the nation-state (and so, obliquely, to the emancipation of business from political constraints).

On politics, this latest development is making an impact the extent of which we are only beginning to assess, searching for a conceptual net in which new realities could be caught to be adequately examined. Most of the concepts inherited from the times of 'solid modernity' conceal more than they reveal of the new arrangement and delay noticing what is truly novel and fast-growing in importance. Particularly prominent among such concepts is that of power. Central to political science and the sociological study of politics, the concept of 'power' had been from the start of the modern era 'state-oriented', made to the measure of 'affairs of state'. Its uses in the modelling of areas of life other than those administered by the state had a metaphorical character: the birth-marks of the concepts were difficult, perhaps impossible to erase, whatever their uses. The umbilical cord which tied the idea of power to such inalienable attributes of the state as (territorial) sovereignty, domination, coercion and enforcement, the expectation of discipline and pattern promotion, protection and maintenance, was never cut. With whatever qualifier it has been supplemented and to whatever area of human cohabitation it was applied, the idea of power tacitly assumed a close and unbreakable *engagement* between the sides: between the

dominant and dominated, the rulers and the ruled, the governing and the governed, administrators and the administered, managers and the managed – all tied fast together for better or worse in a durable and non-negotiable bond of mutual dependency (permanent in its intention, if not in fact).

It is precisely that assumption of lasting mutual dependency that can no longer be credibly upheld. The power flowing in the liquid-modernity global network has got rid of the ballast of durable bonds and commitments. Coercion need not be therefore its principal resource – nor does the drive towards monopoly of the means of coercion need to be its principal stratagem. Power is measured these days by the agent's ability to break the bond, to escape dependency unilaterally. As the engagements become fragmentary and episodic, the agents who are free to move away from the confrontation and shed the commitments of which their bond had been woven move to the dominant side of power-relationship; and the agents incapable of holding their partners-in-engagement in place, and arresting or at least slowing down their movements, drop and settle on the dominated pole.

Domination now has no need of coercion and would gladly do without it, since coercion, as much as the responsible and thus cumbersome cares of wardenship, calls for engagement – and engagement means *constraint on mobility*. It is the fragility of bonds, their in-built transience and 'until-further-noticeness', coupled with temporariness of commitment and revocability of obligations, that constitutes the new frame (if perpetual frame-breaking can be called a frame) of power-relationships. Once the mobility and evasiveness of some cast the rest into a position of acute and disabling uncertainty, the expectation of submission and obedience need not rest on surveillance, disciplining drill or ideological indoctrination. The new power hierarchy is built of speed and slowness, of freedom to move and immobility. At stake in the power struggles is the liberty of one's own movements, coupled with the constraints imposed on the movements of others. Among the most coveted spoils of victory is enhanced mobility, protected by 'slowing down' capacity.

The power hierarchy is steep and is a site of continuous and permanently inconclusive combat. The distinctive mark of liquid modernity is, so to speak, continuous 'disembedding' with little prospect of reliable 're-embedding'; extant frames go on being dismantled but are no longer replaced by 'new and improved ones', since fluid power relations are seldom durable enough to solidify into institutional frames and since a fluid *modus vivendi* hardly ever emerges from the tug-of-war stage for a time-span long enough to ossify into habitual routines.

In the absence of institutionalized frames and with powers-that-be lukewarm at best, but more often than not hostile to their re-assembly and instead bent on further de-regulation, the boundary between coercion (that is legitimate, read: habitualized, violence) and violence (to wit illegitimate, read: contingent, coercion) cannot but be hotly contested. The redrawing of this boundary is the object of ubiquitous 'reconnaissance skirmishes' whose aim is to find out how far one can move and how much ground one can

capture with no fear of a potent counter-attack, or how much punishment the other side will take without responding in kind.

Boundaries are as fluid as the power-balances whose projections they are. No wonder that liquid-modern society is a vast theatre of boundary wars – the battleground of endless ‘reconnaissance skirmishes’. As in the case of Wagner’s endless melody or Derrida’s infinite deconstruction, there is no plausible finishing line to this kind of ‘bargaining through trial of strength’: each successful challenge throws open new battlegrounds and prompts further challenges.

It was one of the more salient characteristics of modernity in its ‘solid’ stage to visualize an a priori limit to order-building endeavours – be it an ideal model of stable economy, a fully equilibrated system, a just society or a code of rational law and ethics. Liquid modernity, on the other hand, sets the forces of change free to ‘find their own level’ after the pattern of the stock exchange or financial markets, and then go on seeking better or more suitable levels, never accepting any of the (by definition interim) levels as final and irrevocable. True to the spirit of that fateful transformation, the model of ‘social justice’ as the ultimate horizon of trial-and-error sequence has been all but abandoned in favour of the ‘human rights’ rule/standard/measure to guide the never-ending experimentation with satisfying and/or acceptable forms of cohabitation. If models of ‘social justice’ struggled to be substantive and comprehensive, the human rights principle cannot but stay formal and open-ended. The sole substance of that principle is a standing invitation to register claims and to bid for the claims’ recognition. The question of which one of the rights, and of which of the many groups or categories of humans, has been (wrongly) overlooked, neglected, refused recognition or insufficiently catered for, is not and cannot be pre-empted or decided in advance. The set of possible answers to that question is in principle infinite, and the choice of answers is always open to renegotiation: in practice, to ‘reconnaissance battles’. With all its universalistic ambitions, the practical consequence of the ‘human rights’ appeal for the claims of recognition is a perpetual differentiation and divisiveness.

As Jonathan Friedman (1999) suggested, we have been landed now with modernity without modernism: a passion for transgression without a clear vision of ultimate purpose and destination. More than that has changed, though: the new global power elite, exterritorial and uninterested in ‘engagement on the ground’ or downright resentful of it, particularly of a till-death-us-do-part sort of engagement, no longer entertains the ambition to design order nor has much taste for order-administration and day-to-day management. The projects of ‘high civilization, high culture, high science’, converging and unifying in their intention if not in practice, are no longer in fashion, and those cropping up occasionally are not treated differently from sci-fi products, are cherished mostly for their entertainment value and on the whole muster no more than fleeting interest. To quote Friedman once more: ‘In the decline of modernism . . . what is left is simply difference itself and its accumulation.’ [O]ne of the things that is not happening is that

boundaries are disappearing. Rather, they seem to be erected on every new street corner of every declining neighbourhood of our world' (1999: 239, 241).

It is in the nature of 'human rights' that although they are meant to be enjoyed *separately* (they mean, after all, the entitlement to have one's own difference recognized and so to remain different without fear of reprimand or punishment), they have to be fought for and won *collectively*, and only collectively can they be granted. Hence the zeal for 'boundary erecting': in order to become a 'right', a difference needs to be shared by a group or a category of individuals and so become a stake in collective vindications. The fight for and the apportionment of individual rights result in intense community-building – digging trenches and training and arming assault units. Being different becomes a value in its own right, a quality worth fighting for and preserving at all costs, and a clarion call to enlist, to close ranks and to march in step. First, however, the difference must be *recognized*: more exactly, a difference must be found or construed fit to be acknowledged as an entitlement to claims under the 'human rights' rubric. For all these reasons, the principle of 'human rights' is a catalyst triggering production and self-perpetuation of difference.

When human rights replace the project of a good society and social justice as the last-resort attempt to find a guiding principle of human co-existence, in a world that no longer holds the promise of domesticating contingency and taming spontaneity – an environment is created that is hospitable and fertile for the intense production of difference. As Eric Hobsbawm observed, 'never was the word "community" used more indiscriminately and emptily than in the decades when communities in the sociological sense became hard to find in real life' (1994: 428); 'Men and women look for groups to which they can belong, certainly and forever, in a world in which all else is moving and shifting, in which nothing else is certain' (Hobsbawm, 1996: 40). Jock Young supplies a succinct and poignant gloss: 'Just as community collapses, identity is invented' (1999: 164). Another gloss is called for, however: 'identity' is the community's posthumous life – the ghost of the deceased community; but it is also a potent tool in the hard labour of the 'invention of community' masquerading as community-resurrection.

Commenting on Søren Kierkegaard's proto-psychoanalytical call to 'destroy the self' for the sake of freedom to race up to the complex reality of existence, Ernest Becker compared 'identity' to a painstakingly built prison mistaken for a shelter. Kierkegaard, in Becker's opinion:

... knew how comfortable people were inside the prison of their character defenses. Like many prisoners they are comfortable in their limited and protected routines, and the idea of a parole into the wide world of chance, accident and choice terrifies them. . . . In the prison of one's own character one can pretend and feel that he is *somebody*, that the world is manageable, that there is a reason for one's life, a ready justification for one's action. (1997: 86–7)

Writing from the depth of 'solid modernity', Kierkegaard rebelled against imprisonment, rather than objecting to his fellow-citizens pining after self-made prisons. The kind of prisons Kierkegaard saw around survive however today mostly in the form of myth and misdirected nostalgia. Today's prisons – the self-built prisons, the prisons which Becker calls on us to dismantle – are responses to the breakdown of those that used to appal Kierkegaard. Desperate and passionate these responses may be, but they are bound to be indecisive, inconclusive and in the end self-destructive.

The fragility of identities which – however painstakingly construed and valiantly defended, can never hold as fast as the 'preordained' essences which they earnestly try to emulate, simulate or dissimulate – is one reason for this state of affairs. But there is another reason, more potent than the first. We live, after all, in a time which de-legitimizes all sacrifice of freedom in the name of security, let alone for the sake of a prison-style comfort. The kind of freedom that has been lifted to the rank of the topmost value of liquid modernity means, to quote Christopher Lasch, 'keeping your options open'. Identities need to be fit to 'be adopted and discarded like a change of costume' (Lasch, 1983: 38). Which does not diminish the zeal with which the prisons of identities are coveted and patched together: it only tops up that zeal with seething passions, perpetual suspicion and fits of desperation. The inner incurable contradiction of the project results in an erratic, disjointed conduct which further adds to the confusion and anxiety from which it was meant to provide an escape.

Another escape is therefore needed: this time from the awesome truth that the project of the original escape (as Ulrich Beck put it: of finding biographical solutions to systemic contradictions) has been faulty from the start and will not work. Such an escape is sought, again in vain yet at enormous psychological and social cost, in Jock Young's 'essentialism': the tendency to 'cast difference in an essentialist mould' which is 'always liable to demonization and conflict'. The demonization of others who are blamed for the failure of 'identity project' is difficult to avoid: it is, after all, 'based on the ontological uncertainties of those who would site themselves at the centre stage' (Young, 1999: 148, 165) – and ontological uncertainties are endemic to the 'liquid modernity' condition and removable, if at all, only together with that condition. If solid modernity was an era of the wars of liberation, liquid modernity is the time of the wars of recognition.

Much as one can, after Isaiah Berlin, distinguish between 'negative' and 'positive' freedom, one can speak of *negative* and *positive* recognition of identity (one could have said 'different identity', if not for the fact that 'identity' and 'difference' connote the same concern and strategy and can be interpreted as synonymous notions).

More often than not, negative recognition is what the currently fashionable 'multiculturalist' stance of the new global business-and-information elite boils down to. In Mary Kaldor's words, there is:

... growing cultural dissonance between those who see themselves as part of an international network, whose identity is shaped within a globally linked

and oriented community of people who communicate by e-mail, faxes, telephone, and air travel, and those who still cling to or who have found new types of territorially based identities . . . (1996: 43)

The latter are, first and foremost, the excluded, the disempowered, the 'tied to the ground' and hotly-resented-when-on-the-move populations, confined to their 'home territory' and criminalized when they rebel against their confinement. For such populations, the place they occupy acquires a brand-new significance since (as Joan Cocks explains) that place, unless their sovereign rights to it are recognized, 'cannot be counted on or remain intact' (2000: 46).² These are the kind of concerns, however, which the merely negative recognition willingly granted by the global elite would not address.

Negative recognition consists in a 'let it be' stance: you have the right to be what you are and are under no obligation to be someone else, as there will be no pressure to 'acculturate' or 'assimilate': in stark opposition to the era of nation-states building in the times of 'solid' modernity, there will be no cultural crusades, no proselytizing, no missionaries, no demand to convert. Negative recognition may well boil down to the tolerance of the otherness – a posture of indifference and detachment rather than the attitude of sympathetic benevolence or willingness to help: let them be, and bear the consequences of what they are. In such a case, insisting on difference and refusing to compromise may have to be paid for with distributive handicap; in the competitive game for resources and rewards, 'being different' may well prove a liability even if discrimination is formally outlawed.

If this is not a sufficient reason to render the prospect of negative recognition unappetizing and – when granted – unsatisfactory, there is another potent reason why the groups or categories demanding acknowledgement of their separate identity would not easily settle for merely negative recognition: just 'being tolerated' would not endow the identity they claim with the comforting and healing faculties for which it has been desired. The cognitive frame in which tolerance is granted is totally out of tune with the frame in which it is sought and received. Tolerance is granted in the spirit of a (joyfully embraced, or resignedly accepted, as the case may be) *relativism*. Those who grant tolerance consider a way of life different from their own to be a matter not important enough to wage a war for; or suspect that the war is lost before it has been started or too costly to undertake. For one reason or another, they 'agree to disagree' – yet their agreement more often than not is unilateral (a contradiction in terms, as agreements go) and so the truce is likely to be observed by one side only. The act of tolerance diminishes, instead of magnifying, the identity's importance which for the fighters for recognition was the most precious and avidly desired stake of the struggle – the prime cause of going to war. Since the tolerant are (as Nicholas Lobkowitz [1999: 173–7] convincingly argued), overtly or implicitly, relativists – the gift they offer to the seekers of recognition is tainted – unattractive and so unwanted.³ Unlike the tolerance-givers, the seekers of recognition are, outspokenly or covertly, essentialists or fundamentalists:

whatever formula they may use to match the prevailing mood and so to serve better their cause (paying lip-service to the principle of equality in particular), the difference for which they seek recognition is not one of many, equal among equals – but a quality not just precious in its own right but endowed with a unique value which other forms of life lack: perhaps even superior to such forms of life as could be adopted without worry about their recognition and so would not raise the issue of recognition were the carriers of difference allowed, able and willing, to practise it matter-of-factly. Only a difference endowed with such a status would fit the bill issued to the postulated identity.

Only *positive* recognition is therefore on a par with the purpose of war: only positive recognition may insure the seekers of recognition against the unduly high costs of staying different, and only positive recognition can endorse the intrinsic value of the difference and thus sustain the dignity which it bestows on its bearers. Positive recognition, it is hoped, will fulfil both these ends (and so re-forge the liabilities into assets) through tying the postulate of recognition to *distributive* justice. ‘Positive recognition’, unlike negative recognition, augurs ‘positive discrimination’, ‘affirmative action’ and subsidizing the cultivation of identity; in short, an entitlement to preferential treatment and to the award of extra points on the ground of being different from the rest. Distributive justice is the natural sequel of the war of recognition; the second is incomplete until it finds fulfilment in the first.

Nancy Fraser was therefore right when she complained about ‘widespread decoupling of the cultural politics of difference from the social politics of equality’ and insisted that ‘justice today requires *both* redistribution and recognition’ (1999).

It is unjust that some individuals and groups are denied the status of full partners in social interaction simply as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of cultural value in whose construction they have not equally participated and which disparage their distinctive characteristics or the distinctive characteristics assigned to them.

I have indicated before that the logic of the war of recognition presses the combatants to absolutize the difference: it is difficult to eradicate the ‘fundamentalist’ streak in any claim which makes recognition demands, in Fraser’s terminology, ‘sectarian’. Placing the issue of recognition in the frame of social justice, instead of the context of ‘self-realization’ (where, for instance, Charles Taylor or Axel Honneth prefers to put it) has a de-toxicating effect: it removes the poison of sectarianism (with all its unprepossessing consequences like social separation, communication break-down and self-perpetuating hostilities) from the sting of recognition claims. It also stops the recognition of difference just on the edge of the relativist precipice. If recognition is defined as the right to equal participation in social interaction, and if that right is conceived in its turn as a matter of social justice, then it does not follow (to quote Fraser once more) that ‘everyone has an equal

right to social esteem' (that, in other words, all values are equal and each difference is worthy just because of being different), but only that 'everybody has an equal right to pursue social esteem under fair conditions of equal opportunity'. Cast in the framework of self-assertion and 'self-realization' and allowed to stay there, recognition wars lay bare their agonistic (as the recent experience has confirmed, ultimately genocidal) potential; if returned to the problematics of social justice where they belong, recognition claims and the policy of recognition turn into a recipe for dialogue and democratic participation.

All this, I suggest, is not a question of philosophical hair-splitting, nor is it just philosophical elegance or theorizing convenience that are here at stake. The blend of distributive justice and the policy of recognition is, one may say, a natural sequel to the modern promise of social justice under conditions of 'liquid modernity' or, as Jonathan Friedman put it, 'modernity without modernism', which is, as Bruno Latour suggests, the era of reconciliation to the prospect of perpetual coexistence and so a condition which, more than anything else, needs the art of peaceful and humane cohabitation; an era which no longer can (or would wish to) entertain hope of a radical one-fell-swoop eradication of human misery followed by a conflict-free and suffering-free human condition. If the idea of 'good society' is to retain meaning in the liquid-modernity setting, it may only mean a society concerned with 'giving everyone a chance' and removing all impediments to taking that chance up one by one, as obstacles are revealed and brought to attention by successive recognition claims. Not every difference has the same value, and some ways of life and of living together have superiority over others – but there is no way to find out which is which unless each one is given equal opportunity to argue and prove its case.

Richard Rorty hails the passage from 'movement politics' to 'campaign politics'. The first (a characteristic mark, let me add, of 'solid modernity' bent on replacing melted solids with solids that would not melt) is needed to provide a large context within which politics is no longer just politics, but rather the matrix out of which will emerge something like Paul's 'new being in Christ' or Mao's 'new socialist man' . . . This kind of politics assumes that things will be changed utterly, that 'a terrible new beauty will be born'.

In 'movement politics', not just its ultimate purpose but the sole criterion to measure the propriety of each current move lies far ahead and permanently beyond reach – in the unknown or rather unknowable future, that is Emmanuel Levinas's 'absolute Other'. For this reason, movement politics is immune to reality testing and so unable to self-correct, but is exquisitely capable instead of multiplying present miseries in the name of the happiness to come (closer to our point – to refuse, and in good conscience, to give voice to, let alone recognize the legitimacy of such claims as have no place in the perfect world yet to come). On the other hand, a 'campaign' is 'something finite, something that can be recognized to have succeeded or to have, so far, failed'. Thanks to being finite, campaign politics is conscious of the

need to fight human misery here and now, and to measure its own success or failure by the effects of that fight.

Campaigns for such goals as the unionization of migrant farm workers, or the overthrow (by votes or by force) of a corrupt government, or socialized medicine, or legal recognition of gay marriage can be conducted without much attention to literature, art, philosophy, or history. (Rorty, 1998a: 114–15)

Let me note that in all specimens of ‘campaign politics’ listed by Rorty the concerns of recognition politics and distributive justice merge. Through blending them into one no longer divisible whole, campaign politics reflects and brings into the open the shared fate of the battles waged on both fronts: recognition is deceitful or at any rate incomplete unless coupled with distributive corrections, and distributive justice has no chance without the recognition of the right to participate, on an equal footing, in negotiating the mode of existence.

We may conclude that melting together the tasks of distributive justice and the policy of recognition is the meaning of social justice in the present ‘liquid-modernity’ era, while campaign politics compounding the two is its prime, and perhaps its sole, available strategy.

And obversely: the separation of the politics of recognition from the question of distributive justice – a fashion already widespread and spreading wider yet in the current intellectual debates – delivers a ‘double whammy’ to the prospects of a humane and peaceful coexistence which is no longer a matter of choice, either in reality or in fantasy.

On one hand, this fashion endorses the present trend to counter *distributive* claims with the all-too-real threat of social reprobation, degradation and ‘outcasting’, using the allegedly demeaning effect of ‘dependency’ to justify withdrawal of esteem; on top of the pain inflicted on ‘claimants’, the censure and deprecation of ‘dependency’ stokes awesome dangers for the ethical standards of society, since the assumption of the Other’s dependency is both the cornerstone and touchstone of all morality.

On the other hand, separating the politics of recognition from the issue of distributive justice, and enclosing it in the frame of self-realization, endorses the new policy consistently pursued by the fast globalizing powers of the ‘liquid-modernity’ era and carries potentially devastating consequences: the policy of (deliberate) precarization, as Pierre Bourdieu named it – domination attained through, founded on and reinforced by actual or threatened disengagement and the refusal to bear responsibility for its social costs. Cutting off the claims of recognition from their natural distributive consequences makes the granting of recognition as toothless and ineffective as it becomes easy.

The demand for recognition is a claim to humanity and the right to participate in shaping it and enjoying it. Potent forces released by the one-sided globalizing process and aided and abetted by many a current intellectual fashion (notably by much of the ‘communitarian’ philosophy), conspire to

neutralize and defuse that claim by forcing it and encouraging it to be, or re-presenting it as a call 'to be left alone'. The wars of recognition are here to stay. It is the joint task and responsibility of politics and social theory to release their potential as a powerful instrument of justice and humanity, dialogue and cooperation.

The demand for recognition is a bid for full citizenship in a 'global community' not yet in existence, but which is likely to emerge only if that demand is met and honoured. Contrary to the communitarian ideology, the ultimate horizon of the on-going wars of recognition is the promotion of shared humanity, which may only take the form of autonomous individuals able to exercise their autonomy in order to promote and sustain their common property – the autonomous society.

We are still at an enormous distance from that horizon: much needs to be done to bring that horizon any closer. As Michael Lerner and Peter Gabel pointed out recently,

... we were astounded to learn, and after three decades of knowing this still find it difficult to assimilate, that far more people are killed by the ordinary workings of a worldwide system of inequality than were killed by Hitler or Stalin. The reality we don't face is this: every year, over 30 million people starve to death or die of diseases that could have been prevented by providing access to adequate nutrition – while we throw away enough food to feed millions of them. These deaths are the result of what we call 'structural murder', because no one in particular pulls the trigger, but the dead are just as dead. (1999: 10)

I am not sure whether Lerner and Gabel are right when they say that the truth they portray is 'difficult to assimilate'. As a matter of fact, the secret of our triumphant and self-congratulating society celebrating the dawn of the New Millennium as the 'end of history', is the finding of ways to assimilate it without much damage to its balance of mind and without much more than ritual soul-searching and occasional carnivals of charity. If the on-going, year in year out murder which Lerner and Gabel write about can be truly called 'structural', it is because of the accomplishment of the structural feat of separating the question of human rights from the right of humans to participate in joint humanity, and the question of distributive justice from the recognition of difference, and so the choice of forms of life from life's ethical meaning.

As to the conclusion which needs to be drawn, Richard Rorty put it better than I'd be able to express:

We should raise our children to find it intolerable that we who sit behind desks and punch keyboards are paid ten times as much as people who get their hands dirty cleaning our toilets, and a hundred times as much as those who fabricate our keyboards in the Third World. We should ensure that they worry about the fact that the countries which industrialized first have a hundred times the wealth of those which have not yet industrialized. Our children need

to learn, early on, to see the inequalities between their own fortunes and those of other children as neither the Will of God nor the necessary price of economic efficiency, but as an evitable tragedy. They should start thinking, as early as possible, about how the world might be changed so as to ensure that no one goes hungry while others have a surfeit. (1998b: 203–4)

Which words in the quoted sentences refer to distributive justice, and which to the need for recognition? The power of Rorty's statement, its ethical as well as political potential, stems precisely from the fact that such distinction cannot be easily made.

Notes

1. The concept of 'liquid modernity' has been discussed in my book of the same title (Bauman, 2000).
2. Cocks points out that 'travelling for the pleasure of relaxing while consuming a variety of geographical and cultural contexts, world-tourists prompt the reshaping of places to meet their material expectations, helping to corrode, in the long run, the differentiated landscapes and cultures they supposedly wish to enjoy' (2000). The same applies, in much greater measure yet, to the corrosive impact of the global and exterritorial capitalist market.
3. According to Lobkowitz (1999), the question 'how to be tolerant without succumbing to relativism' is nowadays the most daunting issue democracy has to confront.

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