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The City as an Arena for the Expression of Multiple Identities in the Age of Globalisation and Migration

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The City as an Arena for the Expression of Multiple Identities in the Age of Globalisation and Migration

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The City as an Arena for the Expression of Multiple Identities in the Age of Globalisation and Migration

Summary

This paper discusses the concept of toleration as it has been manifested in modern society through two contrasting processes—the prevalence of group identity, and the prevalence of identity defined according to citizenship and individual rights. Referring primarily to the work of political theorist Michael Walzer, the paper describes the historical development of toleration in the U.S., insofar as it is an immigrant nation which has passed through several phases of intolerance and toleration that continue to characterise the dynamics of American society, particularly in the city. Special reference is made to the city of Chicago, the largest city in the Midwest, where immigrants from all over settled, establishing ethnic neighbourhoods. Globalisation and migration have made diversity a defining feature of contemporary society, and cities in particular. The multiplication of identities is being experienced on an individual level as well, giving rise to the recognition of the increasingly 'hybrid' nature of social and personal identification. The paper concludes by calling into question the implications of this post-modern model on the conceptualisation of toleration as well as its manifestations.

Keywords: Toleration, Multiculturalism, Migration, Cultural pluralism, Ethnic self-assertion

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The City as an Arena for the Expression of Multiple Identities in the Age of Globalisation and Migration

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One of the most evident manifestations of the age of globalisation and migration is the multiplication of identities, embodied by the representation of many groups in the political space of cities. In this context, certain political concepts such as toleration are being re-defined. The centrality of toleration in contemporary political and social life is affirmed by political theorist Michael Walzer, who writes "Toleration makes difference possible; difference makes toleration necessary."[1] In other words, a tolerant political climate allows for the existence of differences. At the same time, these differences make toleration a viable political concept. Walzer examines toleration in modern society as it has existed within two paradoxical processes that confer identity. The first of these processes invokes the recognition of national identity that is defined by citizenship and individual rights, and prevails over citizens' other cultural identities. This would be the case of U.S. citizens identifying themselves primarily according to their citizenship, with all other identities, such as Jewishness or Italian origins, as secondary.

This process also posits the State's intervention in protecting individual rights against group practices. For example, the legislation of democratic states in the West prohibits female genital mutilation, a "cultural tradition" practised in 28 African and Asian countries. Immigrants from these countries are known to continue these practices within their ethnic groups in their host countries, and if caught, face penal charges. Another example of a prohibited practice is polygamy, commonly used by Mormons in the U.S., where the State justifies its attempt to stop the practice insofar as it enforces one law for all citizens.[2] Similiarly, the French State would be obligated to intervene on behalf of Muslim girls who do not want to wear customary headdress in public schools, a special provision requested by the girls' parents and granted only through a compromise with the secular State.

The other process is characterised by the prevalence of group identity over the national one, exemplified by those immigrants who continue to practice female genital mutilation, and therefore violate the norms of the State in which they reside and in some cases, are citizens. Some States also emphasise the maintenance of group identity insofar as it is considered fundamental to national identity. For example, the Constitution of Canada endorses multiculturalism, and the governance of migration refers to the creation of favourable conditions wherein different ethnic groups can express their cultures. Canada's mosaic multicultural model is manifested in the neighbourhoods of Toronto, which are divided according to ethnic origin. Ethnic constituents also provide for equal representation of these groups in political institutions and public decision-making.[3]

Modern society has been characterised by the co-existence of these two processes of strong group identification and the protection of individuals' rights. According to Walzer, "The co-existence of strong groups and free individuals, with all of its difficulties, is an enduring feature of modernity."[4] In other words, cultural pluralism and common citizenship go hand in hand in strong democracies, and yet they are not on equal footing, at least for long. "It seems inevitable that individual rights will win out in the long run, for equal citizenship is the basic norm of both the nation-state and the immigrant society."[5]

The discourse on citizenship is less complex since citizenship confers clearly-defined rights and protections. Cultural pluralism, on the other hand, has various manifestations depending on its context, but toleration ought to be one of its basic conditions. Toleration is itself characterised by a range of behaviour that includes resignation, indifference, acceptance, curiosity and enthusiasm. According to Walzer, a successful regime of toleration does not depend on a particular standing on this continuum: Co-existing with 'otherness' without necessarily understanding the 'others' themselves nor their practices, is considered to be an expression of toleration.

The centrality of toleration has become increasingly imminent since globalisation and migration have made diversity a defining characteristic of contemporary society. Highly-skilled immigrants are concentrated in the multi-

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[1] Walzer, Michael. *On Toleration*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1997, p. xii.
[2] *ibid*, 62.
[3] Koenig, Matthias. "Democratic governance in multicultural societies—Social conditions for the implementation of international human rights through multicultural policies," Institute for Sociology, University of Marburg, Germany.
[4] Walzer, Michael. *On Toleration*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1997, p. 87.

[5] *ibid*, 64-65.

nationals of global financial cities such as New York, Los Angeles and London. The Silicon Valley near Los Angeles has become synonymous with this type of immigration: Thousands of mainly Indian immigrants have special visas to work in the technology sector there, a pattern that has also developed in other industrialised countries such as the UK and Germany. Many of these immigrants end up remaining in their host countries, usually because of greater career opportunities. This brain drain phenomenon has been countered, however, by these specialised immigrants' initiatives of developing the industries, educational institutions and general economic conditions of their home countries by utilising the trans-national knowledge networks that they have established abroad.

This type of migration is still an exception, however. Most migrants are doing the unskilled labour that the host societies' decreasing population of native-borns,[6] who are increasingly well-educated, will no longer do. In any case, both types of migrants, along with asylum seekers and refugees, constitute a broad spectrum of migrants that has given rise to an emergent 'post-modern' model of pluralism that transcends the limits of the opposing process of group identity and that defined by citizenship and individual rights. Walzer writes: "In immigrant societies...people have begun to experience what we might think of as life without clear boundaries and without secure or singular identities."[7] The multiplication of identities thus implies a weakening of them, and an inevitable acceptance of the increasingly 'hybrid' nature of social and personal identification.

Some immigrants have begun to articulate their own multiple identities. Albanian poet Gëzim Hajdari, exiled in Italy and considered to be one of the best 'migrant writers'[8] there, writes from the perspective of someone intimately familiar with the destructiveness of nationalism in the former Yugoslavia. His poetry expresses a transcendence of national identity, an existence between borders and at the same time, as an enemy of those borders. This allows him to deflect persistent labels such as *extracomunatario*[9] and even immigrant, as he reckons that fundamentally, all people are immigrants and foreigners. "Man doesn't understand this principle. I try to live by this. I am at home all over the world inasmuch as nowhere in the world."[10]

Hajdari also emphasises the importance of toleration: Indeed, it was this concept that he chose to bring to an inter-cultural seminar called Porto Franco in Tuscany dedicated to producing a dictionary.[11] As defined by Hajdari, toleration is the basis of a free society, whose importance he knew from having lived in a society that had been neither free nor tolerant. He describes the Communist regime of Enver Hoxha, where as a young poet, he observed that any verse that did not praise the regime was not tolerated. In his first volume of poetry, *The Anthology of the Rain*[12] (which had been censored), he describes this atmosphere on the eve of a national holiday:

Tomorrow we will all applaud
and offer infinite smiles
to the platform.
Tomorrow we must forget
that which we have lost.

Yet the concept of 'toleration,' along with 'globalisation' (which I had contributed), became the most problematic at the seminar. How could that be, amongst a group of people purporting to be the enlightened interpreters and leaders of an evolving inter-cultural environment, in the heart of the most historically pluralistic regions of Italy in one of the most pluralistic countries in Europe?

Because toleration is easier to define than it is to live. As Walzer writes, "Toleration makes difference possible; difference makes toleration necessary." Diversity is nowadays something of a catch-word understood as having implicit value. But at the seminar, I found that any divergence from 'acceptable diversity,' was in short, not tolerated. We were a group from over 15 countries, representing all the continents except Australia, and each of us was expected to conform to prescribed cultural or ideological roles. The talented and striking young female poet from Mali was heralded as the future

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[6] See United Nations Report, "Replacement Migration: is it a solution to declining and ageing populations?"

[7] Walzer, Michael. *On Toleration*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1997, p. 87.

[8] See *La letteratura italiana della migrazione: aspetti teorici e percorsi di lettura*, edited by Armando Gnisci, Giulia De Martino, Luciana Menna, Giulia Perrozzi. Rome: Università degli Studi di Roma Tre, 1998.

[9] The Italian term 'extracomunitario' was developed to define citizens from outside of the European Community. After the European Union was founded and all official documents replaced the term with the precise definition of "citizens of non-EU nations", the term continued to be used in Italy to describe immigrants in general, and has a somewhat derogatory connotation. See *Dizionario della diversità: Le parole dell'immigrazione, del razzismo e della xenofobia*. A cura di Guido Bolaffi, Sandro Gindro, Tullio Tentori. Liberal Libri: Firenze, 1998, p. 130.

[10] Author's interview with G. Hajdari, October, 2000.

[11] The seminar is Porto Franco. Toscana. Terra dei popoli e delle culture, Region of Tuscany, Italy. See publication *Le culture della parola e della scrittura: Tracce. Parole di Porto Franco*. Edizioni Polistampa: Firenze, 2001.

[12] Hajdari, Gëzim. *Antologia della pioggia*, Santarcangelo di Romagna: FaraEditore, 2000.

hope of young Malian women and African women in general. As someone from the United States, anything other than an apologetic discourse about Jim Crow and an allegiance to Seattle would have put me at odds with what was tolerated.

Hajdari had been cast as the exiled Albanian, intimately involved with the future of his country and its people. Off-putting, then, when he chose not to answer, at least directly, these heady questions: "Where is Albania going? What is the future of Albania?" With lightness and candour in harmony with his art, he said that he felt part of no nation and all nations at the same time.

The organisers of the seminar were clearly of their own political persuasions and cultural preferences, likely grounded in personal experience and ideological influence. And I am willing to bet that there is not a corner of the world without prejudice and stereotypes. For what it is worth, I certainly believe that Italy—and this region—has represented an oasis of toleration for various groups of people throughout the ages. The experience at Porto Franco only goes to show how difficult diversity can be, and how ambiguous toleration. American law professor Frank Wu writes that true advocates of diversity are advocates of difference: "The supporters of diversity, for example, if they are to be true to the banner they fly, must at least acquiesce to the claim of the Ku Klux Klan member who insists that he, too, must be presented in Congress or in the boardroom. The born-again Christian who asks why there are not more evangelicals like herself on the op-ed page or in front of the classroom has as strong an argument as anyone else."[13] (Wu 1999)

At my university in Chicago, there was an engineering professor and known Holocaust revisionist widely published on the subject. He maintains that the Holocaust is largely a false tale propagated by Jews. Since this university has several Jewish professors and students, there had been periodic efforts—mostly by students—to get this man fired, which as far as I know, have never been successful. Another time, an African American student organisation had invited a member of the Nation of Islam to speak. During his speech, he made several offensive remarks about Jews, of whom there were many in the audience. Freedom of speech? Tolerable discourse? Questions of taste or toleration?

In international society, toleration protects the principle of sovereignty, and diplomatic arrangements are the formal expression of this. Limitations on this sovereignty and therefore on toleration, are manifested by international law and international human rights treaties. For example, a partial embargo was placed on South Africa during the Apartheid regime. Nations' collective condemnation and public pressure are more frequently invoked. The world did not tolerate, for example, that the Nigerian woman, Amina Lawal, be stoned to death for having a child out of wed-lock, as the local Islamic court had ruled. Unforced but effective international pressure (even through petitions) was one of the means of at least getting her an appeals trial. [14]

The History of Pluralism and Toleration in U.S. Society

Walzer is a Jewish American and writes primarily about the situation in the U.S. regarding pluralism and toleration. He examines differences of culture, religion, and way-of-life in general since groups formed on these bases, differently from political groups, are inwardly focused and also require some kind of extended social space for the sake of assembly.[15]

The U.S. is of course an immigrant nation by definition, fundamentally distinct from the nation-state model, where there is implicit pressure to assimilate to the dominant nation and culture. In France, for example, Muslim immigrant girls are discouraged from wearing traditional headdress in state schools since it conflicts with the norms of a nation-state in which cultural assimilation goes hand in hand with citizenship.[16] By contrast, in immigrant societies, schools teach the State's history and "civics", which may inculcate a sense of civic religion as well as political or national identity, but not cultural identity, which is instead determined by individual choice.[17] As Walzer writes, "The state claims exclusive jurisdictional rights, regarding all its citizens as individuals rather than as members of groups. Hence the objects of toleration, strictly speaking, are individual choices and performances: acts of adhesion, participation in rituals of membership and worship, enactments of cultural difference, and so on."[18]

The historical context of cultural pluralism in the U.S. differs from that of Europe, where it developed out of conquest and dynastic alliance. Immigrants came to the U.S. for improved opportunities or mere survival. Walzer writes, "Whatever the pressures that had driven them to the New World, they had chosen to come, while others like themselves, in their own families, had chosen to remain."[19]

The political naturalisation that took place when immigrants became U.S. citizens left a cultural void, given the

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[13] Wu, Frank. " A Different World," *SpeakOut.com*. December 9, 1999.
[14] See Amnesty International web site: www.amnesty.org.uk/urgentappeal
[15] Walzer, Michael. *On Toleration*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1997, p. 10.
[16] *ibid*, 26.
[17] *ibid*, 32.
[18] *ibid*, 31.
[19] *ibid*, 9.

diverse ethnicities that comprised the evolving society. The Americanisation process was a response to this, the cultural naturalisation that corresponded to the melting pot model in which the various ethnicities were to assimilate into one common identity characterised by the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture.

A play entitled "The Melting Pot" (by Israel Zangwill) was the biggest hit on broadway in I908. In the climatic scene, the hero says: "America is God's crucible, the Great Melting Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming! Here you stand, good folk your 50 groups, with your fifty languages and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries... A fig for your feuds and vendettas! Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians—into the crucible with you all! God is making the American."[20]

So the U.S. aspired to transcending the ethnic divisiveness of the Old Continent. But the melting pot ideal and the Americanisation process that it inspired had discriminatory consequences—as Walzer says, brutal extremes but a benign centre, and timidity characterised immigrants' behaviour until relatively recently.[21] Discrimination was directed at immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, and there were various attempts to curb Asian immigration. The National Origins Act in 1924 effectively gave preference to immigrants of Anglo-Saxon origin.

But since immigration to the U.S. was in part voluntary, there was a certain acquiescence on behalf of immigrants to the Americanisation process because it was seen as part of the 'choice' in having emigrated. People changed their family name to become more American, and they forbade their children to speak the languages of the Old World.

In private, they continued the cultural traditions of their ethnic groups, and this was expressed by the development of city neighbourhoods such as "Little Italy" or "China Town", where shops sold typical products from immigrants' countries of origin, and restaurants were opened. But there were limits: Unlike in Toronto, people would not necessarily speak to each other in Italian in Italian shops, and the restaurants began catering to an "American" taste.

The early opposition to the conformist views of the melting pot and the Americanisation campaign was known as cultural pluralism. In 1924, the philosopher Horace Kallen coined this term and defined it according to his ideal of U.S. society, which would function like a symphony orchestra in which each instrument was a distinctive group transplanted from the Old World. Kallen was a German Jew and defended immigrants' resistance to the assimilation that increased as a result of America's involvement in World War I. In political terms, he envisioned the U.S. as being a canopy offering protection for a variety of descent-defined groups.[22]

A contemporary of Kallen, Randolph Bourne, penned the essay "Trans-National America," (1916) in which he sustained the superiority of America's cosmopolitanism in comparison to the more homogenous societies from which immigrants had come. Bourne went one step further than Kallen, however, in emphasising the dynamic mixing of immigrant cultures, what might be close to contemporary inter-culturalism, with its emphasis on cultural exchange and even contamination.[23] A minority of American intellectuals in the 1930s used the arguments of Kallen and Bourne in voicing their opposition to the intolerance of the Americanisation process, but it was only in the 1960s that their ideas would have a significant following.[24]

Until then, religious toleration functioned better than ethnic toleration. Although Jews and Catholics had suffered discrimination, and when John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK) became the U.S.'s first Catholic president, it was a point of pride for both the Irish and Catholic communities, for the most part, the fact that religions came to resemble each other, thereby conforming to the melting pot myth, made them more tolerable.

The Amish is one exception. The group has roots in the Anabaptist movement in Europe that took place at the time of the Reformation. In the U.S., the Amish initially settled in Pennsylvania and were part of William Penn's "holy experiment" of religious toleration. Communities spread across the Midwest, where there are sizeable communities today. The Amish believe in separation from society: They hold their religious services at home, do not use electricity and travel by horse and buggy. A 1972 Supreme Court ruling exempted Amish children from compulsory school attendance beyond the eighth grade, an innocuous compromise for both parties. Walzer writes, "The arrangement is justified in part by the marginalisation of the Amish, and in part by their embrace of marginalisation: their deep commitment not to live anywhere except on the margins of American society and not to seek any influence beyond them."[25]

Most religious groups have expressed their religious identity as secondary to the national one, whose importance is transmitted by civil religion. Walzer writes, "So civil religion facilitates the toleration of partial differences—or it encourages us to think of difference as only partial. We are Americans but also something else, and safe as something else insofar as we are Americans."[26]

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[20] Wattenberg, Ben. "Melt. Melting. Melted," United Syndicated Column, March 15, 2001.
[21] Walzer, Michael. *On Toleration*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1997, p. 98.
[22] Hollinger, David A. *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*. Basic Books: New York, 1995, p. 92.
[23] *ibid*, 94.
[24] *ibid*, 95.
[25] Walzer, Michael. *On Toleration*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1997, p. 68.
[26] *ibid*, 79.

Ethnic Self-assertion

In the 1960s, cultural pluralism gained a following in U.S. society for a number of reasons: The Civil Rights Movement, resistance to the Vietnam War, an end to immigration quotas and non-European immigrant influxes, namely from Latin America and Asia.

There was an awakening in the conscience of many Americans, a sense of returning to one's roots, as the writer Alex Haley symbolised with his book *Roots*, based on oral histories in search of his own family roots in West Africa. Other ethnic groups were also searching for the cultural origins which in part had been lost during the Americanisation process.

This socio-political context allowed for the expression of ethnic self-assertion by groups whose private resistance to the Americanisation process had strengthened their solidarity and identity.[27] African Americans exemplify this, in having created a vibrant culture and literature based on their very resistance to the homogenising and discriminatory aspects of American culture. They also created the Civil Rights Movement, which became a point of reference for national liberation movements throughout the world, and are themselves compared to the process of ethnic self-assertion. Walzer writes: "Ethnic self-assertion has been the functional equivalent of national liberation in other parts of the world."[28]

The fundamental differences between the two lead us to some interesting observations about the nature of ethnic self-assertion. Borders and their guards are among the first results of national liberation movements, but a similar outcome of the process of ethnic assertiveness would effectively give the State the power of choosing ethnic identities and establishing rigid distinctions among them. To ensure their political equality, the State would rely on a quota system that guarantees the representation of certain ethnicities in educational institutions and the professions.[29]

This quota system is commonly known as affirmative action, an issue that has come to the fore in the last decade. Recognised as an attempt to make up for past discrimination, it has applied mainly to African-Americans. It is controversial insofar as it is of questionable fairness and effectiveness. Walzer writes that it is a mechanism that serves to enhance individuals' wealth and progress and not necessarily that of the community; the privileged beneficiaries of the mechanism may indeed become role models for the group, but they rarely return to the group with the intention of improving its conditions.[30] Furthermore, there is an inevitable tension between quota systems and ethnic pluralism, since societies that are ethnically plural by definition ought to be culturally heterogeneous and economically and politically egalitarian. But quotas emphasise group uniformity instead of individual equality, meting out justice as a function of group patterns instead of individuals' life chances.[31] Furthermore, privileging the members of subordinate groups may have long-term benefits, but it usually reinforces intolerance in the short term, breeding resentment between groups.[32]

The State should provide an adequate framework wherein groups may flourish. In this sense, the State encourages toleration, but it cannot guarantee that groups actually survive, which ultimately depends on the vitality of their centres and their ability to compete for political advantage, which in part derives from their ability to turn their group identity into a cause such as prohibition or suffrage. Walzer writes that one of the functions of ethnic assertiveness is to build and sustain the reborn community by creating institutions, gaining control of resources, and providing educational and welfare resources.[33] If groups are not sustained, pluralism may be a temporary phenomenon, particularly given the fact that the characteristic mobility in U.S. society—the lack of the territorially-defined ethnic identities inherent to national liberation movements—potentially weakens groups' necessary vitality.

The greatest difficulties arise for disadvantaged groups, whose conditions are likely to produce new forms of bigotry or else, political correctness. The fact that discrimination against ethnicities and lack of resources have gone hand in hand is another obstacle to pluralism and can feed into an atmosphere of intolerance. Historian David Hollinger warns against the flourishing of "ethno-racial particularisms" in light of the absence of more ambitious self-help programs for the poor.[34] He cites Glenn Loury who argues that the merely "tenuous" commitment of the U.S. to provide for its poor creates an "ideological trap" for African American leaders and intellectuals who think that emphasising black victimisation provides the only secure basis for making claims for their disadvantaged peers. Furthermore, historian of America's poor

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[27] Walzer, Michael. *On Toleration*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1997, p. 84.
[28] Walzer, Michael. *The Politics of Ethnicity: Dimensions of Ethnicity*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1982, p. 13.
[29] *ibid*, 21.
[30] *ibid*, 22.
[31] *ibid*, 23.
[32] Walzer, Michael. *On Toleration*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1997, p. 59.
[33] Walzer, Michael. *The Politics of Ethnicity: Dimensions of Ethnicity*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1982, p. 25.
[34] Hollinger, David A. *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*. Basic Books: New York, 1995. p. 168.

Jacqueline Jones warns that for African Americans to "identify one's interests on the basis of skin colour is to continue to shoulder the burden of slavery."[35] This vicious cycle has direct implications for toleration. As Walzer writes, "No regime of toleration will work for long in an immigrant, pluralist, modern, and post-modern society without some combination of these two: a defence of group differences and an attack upon class differences."[36]

These dynamics are easily observable in the city of Chicago, where the original immigrant neighbourhoods—clustering the Chinese, Italian, German and Ukrainian communities—are still nestled amongst the skyscrapers and old industries. The city is now rimmed by flat stretches of American suburbia, lit up by the signs of commercial livelihood of the more recent immigrant communities: Indian grocers and Vietnamese beauty parlours along-side the Kosher delis and synagogues from when Jewish refugees from the second world war poured into the city.

These are all middle-class areas, but delve deeper into the city, and the real poverty associated with one group in particular—the African-Americans—becomes quickly apparent, as does the truism that poverty begets poverty. One July 4th evening, after fireworks along the lake side downtown, a friend and I were headed back to campus on the metro. Caught up in our discussion, it was only several stops later when the train began emptying out, that my friend pointed out something that I had failed to notice: I was the only white person on the train. He is one of the ten children of Haitian immigrants who have made their home in Miami, Florida. We had taken the train in the wrong direction and found ourselves in the heart of the South Side of Chicago, a reputably rough part of town whose bullet-poked and cocaine filled housing projects—the worst in the U.S.—have only recently been knocked down and their inhabitants re-located in subsidised housing throughout the city.

Nothing happened that July 4th evening—we simply hopped off the train and were lucky enough to get the last night train to campus. Nor should something have necessarily happened, but we (or I, if only on the basis of appearance) were clearly outsiders, and territorial defence is a natural expression of ethnic assertion. Once a group of university students had ventured into the same neighbourhood for a Gospel concert and were being so attacked with glass bottles that a city bus driver stopped mid-road to pick up the students. Another time I went to a campus meeting on reparations for slavery—financial compensation for the descendants of slaves. Although I was interested in the issue, I was even more curious about the student group that had organised it. The group called itself FMO—For Members Only—and was made up of African American students, the same group, incidentally, that had invited the spokesman from the Nation of Islam to campus. As the American poet Robert Frost wrote, "good fences make good neighbours."[37]

Multicultural Issues

The re-birth of ethnic identity in the 1960s paved the way for multiculturalism in the 1990s, a movement that has been most diffuse in the schools and universities, as well as in local government and popular culture. I was in high school when the novelty of a multi-cultural club was created by a group of about twenty of the school's better students and a handful of token minorities. The small numbers reflect the school's minority population, as well as that of the state of Iowa, which, along with the state of Vermont, has the smallest non-white population in the U.S. Iowa City is a university town priding itself on the international crowd that it draws, but foreign graduate students and visiting professors are not usually what comes to mind when one thinks of diversity in the U.S. For the most part, the real life situations of multiculturalism and the struggles it implicates were far removed from where it was safe to have discussions on the issue, often of a politically correct nature.

The call for multicultural education reflects the recognition that American schools, however culturally neutral (but espousing of a 'civic religion') had catered to Protestant and English history and excluded other voices. Multiculturalism called for the recognition of cultures that had been considered marginal, and the teaching of these on equal footing with the Canon of European Studies.

Critics of multiculturalism have claimed that it reinforces pre-fixed identities instead of allowing for individual expression. This goes against the liberal tradition at school, which has aimed to inculcate in students the idea that while they have already been identified by their parents' choices, they are entitled to make their own choices and are obligated to tolerate those of their peers. According to Walzer, American liberalism is defined by this freedom and toleration, which, when manifested in an open and democratic political life, has created the conditions for the development of competition between ethnic groups for recognition and resources in a multicultural society.[38]

Critics of multiculturalism also privilege identity defined by citizenship and its rights and protections over group identity. Bharati Mukherjee, an American writer of Indian origin, writes that multiculturalism may hinder the expression of

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[35] *ibid*, 169.
[36] Walzer, Michael. *On Toleration*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1997, p. 111.
[37] *ibid*, 86.
[38] Walzer, Michael. *The Politics of Ethnicity: Dimensions of Ethnicity*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1982, p. 18.

individual differences: "...the multiculturalist emphasis on race and ethnicity-based group identity leads to a lack of respect for individual differences within each group, and to vilification of those individuals who place the good of the nation above the interests of their particular racial or ethnic communities."[39]

Mukherjee is also critical of the multicultural model in Canada, where she lived for several years. She writes, "For all its rhetoric about a cultural "mosaic," Canada refuses to renovate its national self-image to include its changing complexion. It is a New World country with Old World concepts of a fixed, exclusivist national identity....The multicultural mosaic implies a contiguity of fixed, self-sufficient, utterly distinct cultures."[40] (*ibid*)

Mukherjee came to the U.S. as a creative writing student in her early twenties, intending to stay for two years and then go back to India to marry according to her religion, patrimony, caste and mother tongue. Anything else was considered cultural dilution. Instead, she immediately fell in love with and married a fellow student from Canada, and they eventually settled in the U.S. She chose to have only citizenship in the U.S. because being two things did not make sense to her. For this reason, she has also rejected the hyphenated identities by which many Americans increasingly define themselves. She writes: "I am an American, not an Asian-American. My rejection of hyphenation has been called race treachery, but it is really a demand that America deliver the promises of its dreams to all citizens equally....Rejecting hyphenation is my refusal to categorise the cultural landscape into a center and its peripheries; it is to demand that the American nation deliver the promises of its dream and its Constitution to all its citizens equally."[41]

Similarly, Washington-based columnist Ben Wattenberg says that it is the U.S. Constitution and political power that have kept voting polls open to African Americans in formerly segregated states, not racial data nor the affirmation of hyphenated identities. According to the census from 2000, the 281 million Americans may identify themselves by more than 126 racial and ethnic categories. Wattenberg writes: "Instead of slicing ourselves thin and thinner, we should say what most Americans believe, that we are all Americans, as diverse as we want to be, revelling in our unmeasured and immeasurable diversity, which nowadays should be none of the government's diversity."[42]

According to Walzer, however, the use of hyphenated identities is merely the recognition that "American" is a political or national identity and cultural identity is expressed in the private sphere.[43] This has always essentially been immigrants' underwritten agreement with the U.S.—citizenship as a national, public identity that is separate from the private one, which, however, has only recently started to be assertively expressed in the public sphere as well.

Towards Post-national Identities

The dualism of group identity and common citizenship that Walzer says has characterised modernity is being challenged by the post-modern model of pluralism. The globalisation process may indeed breed cultural homogenisation as its critics contend. But the consequences of the process, namely migration, have created a world without clear boundaries and singular identities, multiplying difference. These dynamics have played out in cities, with their old and new immigrant neighbourhoods, multinationals (such as IKEA, located in the peripheries of cities as far apart as Chicago and Rome), economic migrants in the regular labour market and illegal immigrants hiding out at the margins of society.

This context has invoked a 'post-national' perspective in which citizenship and nationhood have been re-defined according to the conceptualisation of basic rights. Yasemin Soysal writes, "...what were previously defined as national rights become entitlements legitimised on the basis of personhood. The normative framework for, and legitimacy of this model derive from trans-national discourse and structure celebrating human rights as a world-level organising principle. Post-national citizenship confers upon every person the right and duty of participation in the authority structure and public life of a polity, regardless of their historical or cultural ties to that community."[44]

Similarly, the 'post-ethnic' perspective challenges the primacy of ancestry in determining identity, the "prescribed affiliations on the basis of descent" and recognises the inherent multiplicity of individuals.[45] This perspective posits resisting the rigidity of ascribed distinctions between people while recognising the psychological and political functions of groups.

These perspectives have been expressed on a cultural level as well. The poet Gëzim Hajdari professes to live simultaneously between borders and as an enemy of those borders, feeling at home "all over the world inasmuch as nowhere

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[39] Mukherjee, Bharati. "American Dreamer," in *Mother Jones Magazine* (web site edition), 1997.
[40] *ibid.*
[41] *ibid.*
[42] Wattenberg, Ben. "Pigeonhole Proliferation," Newspaper Enterprise Association, 2000.
[43] Walzer, Michael. *On Toleration*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1997, p. 33.
[44] Soysal, Yasemin Nuhoglu. *Limits of Citizenship. Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1994, p. 3.
[45] Hollinger, David A. *Postethnic America. Beyond Multiculturalism*. Basic Books: New York, 1995, p. 117.

in the world."[46] His sense of multiple identities is manifested by his curious decision to write poetry in the Italian language and translate it into the Albanian language. Hajdari's unique ability to negotiate cultures through his art has been widely recognised. Migration literature specialist Armando Gnisci comments, "It is the very experience of being in exile, as testified by Gëzim, that languages and nations can meet and exchange. From this position—not romantic or sentimental—the foreign writer speaks, teaching us all to be foreigners."[47]

Sceptics of the post-modern perspective and its implications for toleration point to its potential superficiality. According to Walzer, the modernist dualism providing for individual and group identities would not be replaced by the post-modernist model, but the latter would be super-imposed over the former, resulting in dispersive and divisive identities.[48] He writes: "The associations that these self-made and self-making individuals form are likely to be little more than temporary alliances that can be easily broken off when something more promising presents itself. Won't tolerance and intolerance in such a setting be replaced by mere personal liking and disliking? Won't the old public arguments and political conflicts about who to tolerate and how far to tolerate them be replaced by private melodramas? Isn't the post-modern project, considered without its necessary historical background, likely to produce increasingly shallow individuals and a radically diminished cultural life?"[49]

"Modernity requires, I have argued, an enduring tension between individual and group, citizen and member. Post-modernity requires a similarly enduring tension with modernity itself: between citizens and members on the one hand and the divided self, the cultural stranger, on the other. Radical freedom is thin stuff unless it exists within a world that offers it significant resistance."[50] In other words, "toleration makes difference possible and difference makes toleration necessary"—but only if there is real difference does toleration have meaning. It follows that free individuals in post-modern society must realise that the objective of toleration was never "to abolish 'us' from 'them' but to ensure their continuing peaceful co-existence and interaction."[51]

In conclusion, living and acknowledging our differences is also perhaps the key to sharing our common humanity at its most intimate. I was reminded of this with the film, *September 11*, a collection of short films by directors from several countries that evoked this tragedy as seen around the world. Politics aside, it showed the September elevenths before "9-11"—the *coup d'état* in Chile in 1973, the massacre of men in Sbrenica in 1995 (July), along with those September elevenths that persist in silent anonymity, such as the African boy's daily search for the money to buy the medicine that will save his dying mother.

Sense of loss and pain are universal, but not abstract, notions. Our ability to empathise with others begins with the deeply-rooted and often disturbing familiarity of what is right in front of us.

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[46] Author's interview with G. Hajdari, October, 2000.
[47] Author's interview with A. Gnisci, October, 2000.
[48] Walzer, Michael. *On Toleration*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1997, p. 90.
[49] *ibid*, 88, 91.
[50] *ibid*, 92.
[51] *ibid.*

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