
19

Does cultural diversity —and multicultural policies designed to accommodate it—undermine democracy and economic solidarity? Many critics of supranational integration as well as most contemporary defenders of some form of liberal nationalism would answer positively. Indeed, the claim is that, other things being equal, the prospects for democracy and economic solidarity are better enhanced in contexts of cultural homogeneity. Both papers discuss whether there is really such a trade off. Yet their authors approach the problem from different perspectives, focus on different aspects and reach quite divergent conclusions, a fact that, in itself, reflects the multiple and complex dimensions of this theme as well as its polemic nature. Instead of linking the two contributions by asking a single question, I would like to draw the attention of the panellists to some of the potential implications of their arguments for the challenging transformations underway in contemporary democratic polities.

Questions for Schnapper and Banting & Kymlicka

Neus Torbisco Casals

Universitat Pompeu Fabra

1 • Schnapper and the nation-state

Let me begin with some remarks on Dominique Schnapper's paper. Although Schnapper doesn't specifically address the issue of economic solidarity, she expresses concern that the gradual decline of the nation-state model in favour of the strengthening and public recognition of other hallmarks of identity may come at the expense of democracy and a common sense of citizenship. In particular, she is worried about the effects on the democratic order of the linguistic dimension of this new trend towards the accommodation of cultural diversity. Indeed, Schnapper claims that the emergence of new policies designed to officially recognise multilingualism in the public sphere will surely undermine democratic practices and erode what she calls "the common political space".

The claim is justified on various grounds. On the one hand, Schnapper reminds us that, historically, linguistic homogenisation has been key to nation building and democratization in modern societies. The experiences of Belgium and Canada are to be viewed, she argues, as somehow confirming the rule. Despite official bilingualism, democratic stability is assured in both countries by the preponderance, *de facto*, of one language and, therefore, constitutional recognition of diversity becomes mostly symbolic. In the case of Switzerland, the balance between democracy and plurilinguism is regarded as exceptional. According to Schnapper, taking into account its unique historical and political circumstances, it is not at all clear that this experience may be usually extrapolated to illuminate other situations.

On the other hand, Schnapper strongly emphasises that language is not only an identity marker, nor simply a means for economic development, but also the primary instrument of democracy.

Consequently, she doubts the possibility of maintaining a common public space, where citizens engage in political life, in the absence of a common language and a common sense of citizenship, thereby endorsing some of the main arguments that critics of multicultural policies have put forward, that is, that a high degree of cultural convergence is necessary to create a genuine democratic community and to foster the wide cooperation and levels of civic education that are required to implement social schemes.

I think Schnapper is right to encourage us to seriously assess the risks of cultural accommodation policies (in particular, some of the linguistic policies that Kymlicka and Banting include within what they designate as MCPs) for democracy. Nevertheless, I disagree with the underlying picture of the dilemmas that multicultural states are facing today and of the role of the state in these complex settings.

First of all, it is in the context of what could be called “fractured nationhood” (that is, where nation building policies aimed at making the cultural and the political congruent have failed) that, I believe, the discussion on MCPs becomes meaningful. This requires to acknowledge that in most cases — and France might be an exception here — the alleged success of the nation-state model is dubious. The strategies towards cultural and linguistic assimilation undertaken by most liberal states had important shortcomings in terms of ethno-cultural conflict between majorities and minorities as well as long struggles for equality and recognition. In these contexts, public recognition (by the state) of the existing pluralism within its borders is often crucial to the preservation of democracy and social unity.

Consider, for instance, the case of Spain. After suffering a civil war and a long dictatorship, the formal recognition of several official languages and of the so-called “historical nationalities” (and of their self-governing institutions) by the 1978 Constitution provided the framework from which to begin a difficult process of reconciliation, democratisation and modernisation of society. Nowadays, most people would agree that the explicit recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity — including the fact that many Spaniards see their identities as primarily linked to being members of, say, the Catalan or the Basque nation — has been key to the success of that process. Democratisation, economic solidarity and welfare have been enhanced, and not impeded, through the constitutional recognition of cultural and linguistic diversity in Spain (not just symbolically, since it even implied the attribution of self-government rights to national minorities).

I think a comparable logic applies to other countries. It is probably true that stability is more vulnerable in these contexts. Yet the success of the model is remarkable once we keep in mind that previous nation-building policies designed to forcibly assimilate citizens into the dominant language or culture had caused deep fractures within the society that *already* threatened democratic values, trust and stability. A crucial question, therefore, arises: had multicultural policies not been adopted, would we still have a united, democratic state in cases like Spain? One could reasonably speculate on the multiple costs of forceful assimilation and lack of recognition of linguistic diversity (from scarce democratic participation and civic commitment to ethnic conflict, terrorism and even civil war).

In short, returning to Schnapper’s paper, even if she is right in stressing that public accommodation of linguistic and cultural diversity involves important challenges for political integration, democracy and justice, I think that she dismisses too quickly the relative success of some experiences. More importantly, she overlooks the context of *lack* of political unity and mutual trust upon which many multilingual/multinational democracies had to be built. As a result, her reasoning can be easily interpreted as constraining political action within the following dilemmatic situation: either we preserve linguistic and cultural homogeneity in order to make democracy work; or we follow the path of recognition of cultural and linguistic rights to the detriment of democracy. But this is a false dilemma. As I suggested, it might be that minority rights are recognised *precisely* to make democracy work, to transform existing institutions to make them more inclusive and representative.

One of the reasons why the nation-state model of sovereignty has become obsolete in the new globalised world is linked to the fact that neither liberalism nor economic progress and mobilisation have

involved the withering away of identities and group attachments that were once seen as irrational (especially by nineteenth-century liberal philosophers and twentieth-century modernisation theorists). As Schnapper herself reminds us, there are few states whose citizens share language, traditions, religion or ways of life. She also admits that many claims for cultural recognition flow from the same underlying democratic principle. We could therefore phrase her views as a conflict of fundamental values. However, as with any other conflict of this sort, the tension cannot be resolved by merely sacrificing one of the competing values entirely. The more sensible solution is to balance them case by case, making finer gradations in order to preserve, or reach an equilibrium among, the core principles involved. As regards multilingualism, this may imply the need to move forward towards complex forms of mutual knowledge of various vernacular languages, a policy that Schnapper also envisages as possible. Undeniably, this option requires economic as well as personal efforts. Yet it is important to be aware that bilingualism has become quite common in countries like Spain or Canada, where people normally assume that there are multiple spheres of government and civic life conducted in different languages and that the common political space is the sum of all of them. In any event, the implementation of other rights (like social and political rights) also requires huge public investments and we don't consider this as a valid reason to suppress them or reduce their significance.

This points to another potential problem with Schnapper's argument as far as the role of the state and other political institutions is concerned. Cultural minorities in many Western societies do not generally complain that the state has restricted their negative freedom, preventing them from developing their cultures and languages in the private sphere. Rather, they complain that these ought not to be seen as private interests while the culture and identity of the majority is regarded as representing the "general will" or the "common interest". Historically, citizenship has not been neutrally defined as a way to transcend all sorts of particularism, as many liberals claim. State institutions have systematically used linguistic assimilation to foster and privilege a particular *culture* which has progressively become identified as *the* "common culture", which defines national identity. As a result, a new form of oppression and domination emerged between members of different cultural groups that should not be neglected. Perhaps not all cultures are compatible with the values underlying democracy — and this seems to be, in some passages, Schnapper's main preoccupation — but this a different question that cannot be answered in abstract terms and, in any case, provides no grounding for the strong claim that linguistic pluralism is not compatible with democracy.

2 • Banting & Kymlicka and worldwide solidarity

Let me turn now to Will Kymlicka and Keith Banting's paper. After examining the basic features of MCPs and describing the main complaints that have been put forward against them, Kymlicka and Banting undertake a careful and systematic empirical analysis in order to determine whether the adoption of these policies in different countries has led to an erosion of the welfare state. The conclusion is, basically, that the criticism is groundless. There is not enough evidence, they claim, to assert that there is a trade-off in practice between a commitment to MCPs and a commitment to the welfare state.

Now, starting from this conclusion, there seem to be reasons to be optimistic about the consolidation of democracy and economic solidarity in the face of deep cultural pluralism. However, one could wonder whether the same reasoning applies when we think about the central question that has been submitted to discussion, not as a domestic challenge, but rather as a challenge for justice at the international level. To start with, what implications can be drawn — if any — from their conclusions for the construction of Europe?

Contemporary Europe provides a new scenario from which to contemplate a gradual change in the traditional locus of sovereignty. Yet there is strong evidence that these transformations have not resulted in a decrease of concern about cultural identities. Far from being in decline, ethnocultural conscience has even gained force. In this context, European institutions probably cannot recreate — at least not without fierce opposition — the same assimilatory features that characterised the emergence of nation-states (appeals to the existence of a common culture, religion or identity) in order to reassert themselves as legitimate political units. Sceptics about the success of European integration beyond the economic level claim that to expect a strong sense of citizenship and solidarity to arise from people's subjection to a set of abstract and distant institutions is unrealistic. It is true that European institutions helped provide a wider political space for co-operation on economic and social issues traditionally confined to the realm of state sovereignty. And yet one can still think that the building of any supranational polity faces the task of finding a way to consolidate democracy, solidarity and social cohesion in the face of deep diversity.

Kymlicka and Banting's arguments could be seen as implying that there is no such a problem (or, more precisely, that the existing problems to achieve transnational justice are not related to the factor

of cultural diversity). But this is not necessarily so. If the correlation that they have tested is between adopting MCPs and *changes* in the welfare state, a central question remains open: what is the role of multiculturalism when the aim is to expand the circles of solidarity in order to create — and not just sustain — some redistributive scheme at the supra-state level? Of course, this is a pressing issue beyond the European framework too. Current huge inequalities and famines in the world should urge theorists to provide an account of the grounds for economic solidarity at the transnational level, a context essentially marked by deep cultural diversity as an essential component.