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Concluding Reflections

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Several of the papers provide grounds for optimism that the potential conflict between economic solidarity and cultural diversity within Western democracies is neither severe nor insurmountable. It appears that the direct financial costs of accommodating diversity are often exaggerated (eg., Grin), as are the indirect corroding effects of diversity on trust and solidarity (eg., Banting). All of the authors emphasized that we only have preliminary evidence on these questions, and that more work needs to be done. Nonetheless, the papers provide grounds for cautious optimism.

However, there is another, deeper, reason for optimism that is implicit in the papers. Most of the papers on the Western democracies start from the assumption that it is at least conceivable that the state can adopt and implement effective policies relating to both economic solidarity and cultural diversity, even if we are unsure about the marginal trade-offs between these two goals. This assumption in turn rests on a set of beliefs about the nature of the state. In particular, it assumes (a) that the state is an *effective* state — ie., capable of enforcing its laws and policies, administering justice, raising taxes, and so on; (b) that the state is what Schnapper calls a “*providential* state” — ie., a state that is capable of adopting policies whose aim is to protect and promote the interests of its citizens, whether those are interests in economic security or cultural identity; and (c) that the state is capable of being *even-handed* amongst its citizens, and is not systematically biased in favour of one group to the detriment of others.

Of course, no actually existing Western democracy lives up to this ideal. Yet it seems to me that most of the papers assume that Western states have the *capacity* for being effective, providential and even-handed, and that we should hold our governments to account for their failings in this regard. Indeed, this assumption is arguably needed to make sense of the questions that Van Parijs has set us. We

can hardly make sense of the idea of possible trade-offs between promoting economic solidarity and respecting cultural diversity if we don't assume that the state is capable of adopting effective and providential policies for its citizens.

If these assumptions are sound — ie., if we do indeed live in countries whose states have the capacity to be effective, providential and even-handed — then I suspect that any trade-offs between economic solidarity and cultural diversity are likely to be modest and manageable. By contrast, the few papers that discuss non-Western countries — Laitin, Seekings and LaFerrara — provide less reasons for optimism. The situation of sub-Saharan African states in particular is dire. Laitin suggests that the high incidence of inter-ethnic violence in these countries is a product of “weak states”. But I would suggest that the problem is not just the weakness of states, but also that they are “predatory” rather than “providential” states, more likely to harm than to help their citizens. The great Africanist Peter Ekeh famously stated that the tragedy of African states is that they are strong enough to harm their citizens, but are too weak to help them.

In one of her previous publications, Yael Tamir provides a nice vignette illustrating the point. Referring to the intense security arrangements at Ben-Gurion airport in Tel Aviv, she says that she does not object to the invasive and time-consuming interrogations and searches performed by state immigration and security officials, because she does not doubt for a moment that these are done for her benefit. By contrast, the customs and immigration officials at the airport in Lagos seem to exist in order to provide patronage and extract bribes, not to benefit the citizens of Nigeria.

The state in this context is mainly seen as a source of rents, and the goal of each ethnic group is to capture the state, since nobody believes in the capacity of the state to act in an even-handed manner towards ethnic groups not in power. In short, far from effective, providential and even-handed states, we have weak, predatory and ethnocentric states.

Of course, this contrast between Western and sub-Saharan African states is over-simplified. In reality, states around the world fall along a continuum ranging from weak to effective, predatory to providential, ethnocentric to even-handed. But for the purposes of our conference, we need to know where states are on this continuum. In the worst cases — such as Somalia, Sierra Leone, or the Congo — it is not clear that we can even make sense of Van Parijs' questions about the trade-off between economic solidarity and cultural diversity. Some states lack the capacity or inclination to adopt providential policies relating to either economic solidarity or cultural diversity.

Van Parijs began this conference with the suggestion that Congo be converted from a French-style unitary state to a Belgian-style multilingual federation. But the shift from a unitary to federal state is unlikely, by itself, to change Congo from a weak predatory state to a providential state that can effectively promote either economic solidarity or cultural diversity. Under these circumstances, it may be that the best option is to think about how groups of people can establish local forms of economic solidarity and cultural recognition outside the formal state apparatus, protected from state predation (as discussed in LaFerrara's paper).

This creates an interesting dilemma for minorities. In many parts of the world, cultural minorities have been able to sustain their communities and cultures precisely because the state has been too weak to suppress them. In Guatemala, for example, the Maya have survived 500 years of colonization with a strong sense of culture and identity precisely because the Guatemalan state was too weak to impose its will on large parts of the territory. Minority cultures have survived, and sometimes thrived, in the gaps left by weak state power. And as a result, they have little incentive to help build a more effective state, unless or until they have strong assurances that the resulting state will be providential and even-handed. Strengthening a state that is still committed to predation or ethnic hierarchy is not in the interests of minorities. Yet, as David Laitin shows, weak states are prone to violence that harms everyone and undermines economic development.

So the papers presented in this conference provide grounds for optimism about the trade-off between economic solidarity and cultural diversity in the West, tempered with pessimism about the situation in some African states. However, we also heard some speakers raise questions about the long-term viability of the traditional Western nation-state. According to Laitin, for example, Western states are becoming "weaker" as a result of globalization, and Tamir suggests that a new class of highly-mobile professionals are seeking to undermine national systems of economic solidarity and cultural protection.

There are complicated issues here, and other speakers defended the resilience of the nation-state, so the jury is still out. My own provisional view is that Western states have not in fact lost their capacity to adopt providential policies for their citizens. In his commentary, Jean Laponce distinguished between the power that drains and dominates and the power that assists and uplifts. Western states have clearly given up some of their power to drain and dominate: they are less able to engage in aggressive war against neighbouring states, for example, or to adopt domestic laws that violate human rights. But I would argue that Western states retain as much capacity

as they have ever had to adopt providential policies: ie., to ensure that their citizens are healthy and well-educated, to uphold the rule of law and administer an independent judicial system, to protect the personal security and liberty of citizens from assault or predation, and to implement effective forms of economic solidarity and cultural recognition. If Western states fail to live up to our ideal of an effective, providential and even-handed state, it is not because they are too weak to do so. It is lack of political will, not lack of state capacity, that is at stake here, and that lack of will is rooted in turn in the passivity or acquiescence of the citizens who elect our governments.