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Spaces and Voices of Diversity – Past and Present On the history and career of a fashionable concept¹

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„We are deeply diverse in our internal characteristics (such as age, gender, general abilities, particular talents, proneness to illnesses, and so on) as well as in external circumstances (such as ownership of assets, social backgrounds, environmental predicaments, and so on). It is precisely because of such diversity that the insistence on egalitarianism in one field requires the rejection of egalitarianism in another.” (Sen 1995, p. xii)

„Diversity in society is one of the spices of life, as well as providing competitive advantages in international diplomacy and trade. Perhaps most important is that from a social systems perspective, cultural diversity enhances society’s adaptability: Alternatives are present in the social system from which to draw when attempting to meet changing circumstances, due to changes in a society’s ecological, or political context, whether arriving from within or outside a society.” (Segall et al. 1999, p. 323)

1. Notes on the development of the idea of “Inclusion of Diversity” and on its reception in social sciences

This essay is an attempt to define the term diversity and its origin. The comparatively recent non-hierarchical perspective on human diversity is a popular discourse within the fields of philosophy, social sciences as well as within the agendas of several public and private institutions. The ideal manner in which social institutions should interact with diversity can be drawn from directives, web presences, invitations to symposia and debates among supranational and especially European institutions. Today – as well as in the past – positive attitudes towards diversity are by no means universally accepted in terms of a social consensus; counter movements within society and politics are still evident. However, there is an important difference between current and past attitudes towards diversity, as positive approaches are now supported by laws and dominant scholarly discourses which celebrate and protect diversity.

The preliminary quotations are exemplary for the currently dominant scholarly understanding of diversity – at least within the discourse which describes and analyses diversity non-dismissively as a “normal” phenomenon. Amartya Sen, author of the first excerpt, is a philosopher and Nobel laureate in economics. The four authors of the second quotation, Marshall H. Segall, Pierre R. Dasen, John W. Berry and Ype H. Poortinga hail from backgrounds in anthropology as well as psychology and empirically explore human behavioural patterns in their eco-cultural contexts (Segall et al. 1999, p. 57). In the excerpts quoted above, the authors further stress normativity and – based on their internationally comparative empirical studies – advocate the importance of human diversity for

diplomacy and trade, but also more generally for social adaptability. In practise this means that, according to Segall et al., the ability to adapt to changing demands is more favourably pronounced in those who are aware of the positive nature of diversity and have experienced and reflected upon this phenomenon through their personal histories, coming to the conclusion that there are many distinctive, socially and geographically definable systems of norms and values which are in a constant process of change and mutual influence.

Both excerpts implicitly suggest that diversity is a normal phenomenon rather than an exception, an attitude which has synchronously emerged in scholarly discourse (particularly within the social sciences involved in and supporting the linguistic and the qualitative turn), among international organisations and within civic movements (e.g. within the US American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s). Hierarchies and judgemental comparisons that have developed over centuries are called into question in an attempt to debase any empirical or theoretical vindication for hierarchical structures which have led to manifold historical instances of discrimination and ostracism. The descriptive perspective, which is based on the epistemic position of constructivism and challenges essentialist presumptions, evolves into a paradigmatic discourse. Various disciplines participate in this reflection of diversity and of the relationship with the “Other” – ranging from philosophers to political scientists, from ethnologists or cultural anthropologists to social scientists, from psychologists (especially cross-cultural psychologists) to educators. Depending on the epistemic perspective and cultural tradition of each discipline the discussion of “including the Other” may be theoretical (Habermas 1996), or may be based on the survey and analysis of empirical data which attempt to describe human diversity and convey diversity management in a comprehensive manner (Todd 1994; Berry et al. 2006).

Diversity as a topic for political and scholarly discourse has not appeared out of thin air, however. In attempting to comprehend the genesis of the contemporary discussion on the phenomenon of diversity it can be helpful to trace its precursors. Naturally, within the scope of this essay, only a rough and one-sided sketch can be delivered. The perspective can only be occidental, for the most part even eurocentric, as it would be a mammoth-task for a monumental comparative study to map the history of human diversity management, calling on scholars from all around the globe. A first level would be the diachronic and synchronic empirical compilation of the different forms of handling diversity employed by various societies, differentiating between a macroscopic (world; societies), a mesoscopic (institutional systems such as school systems; municipalities or health care (cf. Allemann-Ghionda, Hallal 2011) and their policies towards diversity) and a microscopic perspective (interaction between individuals and non-institutional groups). An additional meta-level would have to be concerned with the discourse and self-image of scientific communities on broaching and managing the topic of diversity in a diachronic perspective. Depending on geographical, historical, religious, national and socio-cultural factors, various distinctive interpretations should be expected. The methods of comparative research would have to be applied and coordinated diligently and rigorously. It should be made transparent whether a particular perspective is emic or etic. The idiographically oriented emic viewpoint would generate different observations and conclusions than the nomothetical, etic perspective (cf. Segall et al. 1999, pp. 39-41). Researchers from countries and cultural backgrounds other than western, who possibly rely on different research traditions than those present in western countries, may have differing epistemic interests and viewpoints which have not yet been established in western (or more specifically in European) scholarly discourse (Scheidgen et al. 2005).

With the caveat of the unavoidable ethnocentricity and incompleteness of a diachronic reconstruction this essay will point out several segments which indicate a development of the contemporary discussion of diversity. Bulgarian-French social scientist and historian Tzvetan Todorov has contributed prominent publications on the development of the discourse on difference and diversity with regard to the first contact between Europe and America from 1492 onwards, most prominently the encounters of the Aztecs with Cortez and his conquistadores between 1519-1521

(Todorov 1982/1999). Based on the analysis of pictorial and written sources – particularly the bilingual chronicle known as *Codex Florentinus* which was written by the Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún between 1547 and 1585 (Sahagún 1956) – Todorov interprets the physical confrontation and verbal as well as non-verbal communication between the European “discoverers” and the native population of Mesoamerica in the first third of the 16th century. For the first time according to Todorov, this contact (parallel to political and military conflict) spawned reports and reflection on the idiosyncrasies and differences of the two cultures – Hispano-Christian on the one hand and Aztec, Non-Christian on the other – on both sides. Despite Sahagún’s ethnocentricity, who held his own European and Catholic culture as the authoritative standard, his meticulous description initiated an interaction with the “Other” and a meta-discursive reflection which is relativistic to an extent and raises the question of the *manner of engagement* with the “Other”. At the very least, the plane of negating the human nature of the “other” culture is left behind, after the light-skinned Spaniards on horseback had been perceived as gods while the darker-skinned Aztecs with their strange language and clothing had been regarded as animals – or at least less-evolved human beings (possibly without a soul) – by their vis-à-vis during the very first contact. Sahagún describes the religious rituals of the Aztecs with their unimaginable ferocity. The chronicler may have been aware that there was nothing squeamish about the methods used by the Inquisition in the name of religion, which raises the question what Sahagún intended to achieve with the detailed description of the sanguinary practises of the Aztecs. What is apparent, however, is an effort to understand the Aztec society, its underlying values and the derived norms, morals and behaviour. Sahagún also details several aspects of daily life – not only ceremonies, but also everyday customs as well as methods of child-rearing and of higher education for nobles (Leonard 1971, pp. 142 f.). The ultimate goal of this comprehensive ethnographic chronicle was the Christianisation of the Aztecs; in order to reach this goal, Sahagún attempted to gather as much information as possible in order to facilitate effective communication. Sahagún’s life’s work also includes the founding of the Colegio Imperial de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco (1536), an institution for higher education which trained young Aztecs (mainly, but not exclusively, noblemen) to become priests. The instructors were not exclusively Europeans, but also some Aztecs. The curriculum (taught in Spanish, Latin and Nahuatl) not only included conventional Western subject matter, but also Aztec culture. The fact that Sahagún’s purpose was proselytism does not diminish the merit of his scholarly contribution. The unearthing of knowledge which would otherwise have largely remained cryptic is owed to Sahagún’s records. He is held as the founder of modern cultural anthropology and of American studies.

The exploration of America and of other continents by the Europeans, colonialism and the establishment of slavery have made broaching the issue of dealing with the “Other”, i.e. with alterity, inevitable in scholarly discourse and politics in Europe and successively in North-America and in other Anglophone territories. The historical-philosophical development of the discourse on diversity among French philosophers, historiographers and politicians is retraced in a further book by Todorov. He reconstructs the topoi which have been deployed in an attempt to find a stance between universalism and relativism. Todorov’s explicitly western and reflectively universalist perspective is summarised in his formula “*humanisme bien tempéré*” (Todorov 1989/1993).

The scholarly discourse on human diversity and argumentative statements on hierarchical and ethnocentric ascription of individuals or groups based on customs and behavioural patterns deviating from a familiar horizon of experience may have started in the approach of Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), a contemporary of friar Sahagún. Of particular interest is the first book of his *Essais* (1575-1588), under the heading „*Of custom, and that we should not easily change a law received*” (Montaigne 1575/1877). Montaigne comments on examples of behavioural patterns which, although they may have appeared bizarre to the French aristocracy of his time, could nonetheless be accounted for and explained by reason. Several lines of difference, to use modern terminology, are present in his argument: social class, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation.

Montesquieu (1689-1755) continues the discourse on the normality of subjectively strange conventions in his epistolary novel *Lettres Persanes* (first published anonymously in 1721). His protagonist, the Persian Usbek, travels through parts of Europe on his way to Paris, accompanied by his friend Rica. He naively describes whatever he sees and experiences in his letters to the friends whom he had met on his journeys – mimicking the manner in which a citizen of a far removed civilisation might view the countries of Europe or the descriptions of exotic destinations by European travellers. A particular focus lies on the customs and conditions of everyday life in 18th century France.

Nonfictional precursors to Montesquieu's *Lettres*, e.g. earlier reports of “foreign” conventions and institutions, include Marco Polo's *Il Milione*, dictated by Marco Polo to Rustichello da Pisa in 1298/1299, while both were war prisoners in Genua (Moule, Pelliot 1938). From much earlier times, we may consider in the same way a number of descriptions or episodic observations by classical authors and Arabian scholars (for further details see Allemann-Ghionda 2004, pp. 18 ff.). However, the epistemic outlook of Montaigne and Montesquieu is of a different quality than that of authors who lived in ancient and mediaeval times. Scientism and enlightenment are at the forefront of the rational, explicitly comparative treatment of unfamiliar conventions and customs. The view of the “other”, which is consciously constructed and commented on by Montesquieu, paved the way to that cultural relativism which was later taken up by the works of other writers of the 18th century and in some cases reduced *ad absurdum*. The *Lettres Persanes* combine the contradictions of the discussion of diversity. The character Usbek, torn between modernist ideas and his Islamic faith, is punished harshly through the revolt of the women of his harem and the suicide of his mistress Roxana.

Voltaire commented on cultural relativism in several of his works. He criticises both his own and a second, illustrated society in *Zadig* (Voltaire 1747). In his *Traité sur la tolérance* (Voltaire 1763), he severely admonishes religious fundamentalism, particularly that of the Jesuits who raised him. In a number of works, the deist Voltaire, appreciative of Islam, processes the influence of eastern (but also of western) cultures on various civilisations, ranging from Greco-Roman antiquity to the Orient. The change in perspectives from emic to etic is diversely reflected and exhibited in Voltaire's corpus of literary works.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (Rousseau 1755), reconsiders the origin of inequality based on the idea that differences in status and in access to power do not occur naturally. His thesis of inequality as a man-made phenomenon was a powder keg for his contemporaries and holds a leading function in the discourse on diversity even today. The notion of inequality as a social construct was received as social and political sacrilege by the establishment on the eve of the French Revolution, as the deconstruction of the dogma of a “natural” hierarchical order of social classes was to lead to a forfeiture of authority. Today, this idea is considered as a matter of course in prevailing scholarly discourses.

Following the ratification of the Constitution of the United States of 1787 and the French constitution of 1792, the issue of equal rights and opportunities for people with diverse ancestry and religious beliefs as well as for people of both genders has gradually become a pillar of political rhetoric. Condorcet's programme of national education relies on the idea that everyone – boys and girls of any ancestry – has a right to education, a right which was to be safeguarded and provided by the government and which can be considered revolutionary for its time (Condorcet 1792). The matrix of the abolishment of hierarchy within human diversity, as it had tentatively emerged in the works of Montaigne and Montesquieu (among others), was in fact inspired by the ideas of the Enlightenment, specifically by the postulates of equality, equity and the underlying concept of universal Human Rights. The basic reality that political and social practice always lag behind scholarly principles must be mentioned, but does not factor into the discussion of this essay – neither does the fact that political discourse occasionally sees the re-emergence (and in some cases even dominance) of attitudes which argue for a concept of “natural” inequality.

The approach to the treatment of differences which, according to Amartya Sen, are either (a) innate or individually acquired or (b) constructed by society and institutions, is not only a conceptual, theoretical and semantical issue, i.e. an abstract concept of mere rhetorical interest. It is rather connected to the question, which theory implicitly or explicitly informs particular institutions in developing strategies for diversity management. To follow Sen's pointed assertion: from a modern perspective the polarisation between total egalitarianism on the one hand and rejection of equal treatment, i.e. discrimination, falls short. In some cases and under certain conditions, equal treatment will help achieve the demands of equity and of Human Rights; in certain other cases, non-discrimination can prove inadequate, however, and positive discrimination is better suited to accommodate for particular needs than equal treatment. The decision for or against positive discrimination and the extent of corresponding policies can possibly lead to a dilemma regarding the reconcilability with Human Rights and the present laws of a country. There can be no doubt that physical disability needs to be taken into account, leading to positive discrimination – e.g. in educational institutions. However, issues of competing privileges based on religion or gender discrimination are more controversial and may be discussed differently depending on culture, country or religion, as the enlightened postulates of Human Rights and gender equality are not universally accepted.

The discourses on acceptance, respect and equality of differences emerging in the revolutionary constitutions of France and the USA, show similarities both in their political rhetoric and in their underlying philosophical principles. This common ground of respect, equality, acceptance of differences and the emphasis of national unity is explained by the close relation between these two constitutions: the French constitution of 1792 is a daughter of the Constitution of the United States, chronologically and in its ideology. Nonetheless, the established North American and French discursive traditions (which are not homogeneous in either country) differ in a fundamental aspect. The North American constitutions of the US and of Canada do not only acknowledge individual rights, but also collective rights of groups, especially of minorities – not only of ethnic and cultural minorities but rather of any kind of distinctive community according to several lines or features of (not only ethnically defined) difference. The French constitution, on the other hand, only acknowledges individual rights of its citizens (*citoyens*). These two models are diametrically opposed approaches to diversity: communitarianism / particularism / differentialism on the one hand (i.e. positive discrimination of communities) and universalism on the other (i.e. equal treatment of individuals regardless of differences and group affiliations) in differing degrees of radicalism. Any nation and its institutions assume a variety of one or the other model or an intermediate compromise in their treatment of ethnic and cultural groups, as evidenced by a historically, sociologically and demographically comparative analysis by Todd (1994) who also suggests a systematic typology. As a result, strategies come into being which either form a trend towards integration or separation, either inclusive or exclusive approaches, either emphasising or minimising difference, either based on a universalist or on a particularistic point of view. According to Gomolla and Radtke in their survey on German schools (Gomolla, Radtke 2002), any institution that separates based on ethnic or socio-economic attribution is a proponent of institutional discrimination. International comparison is an important tool to show which of the two models informs a given educational system in its approach to diversity (Allemann-Ghionda 2002; Gomolla 2005). The contrast between the institutional treatment of religious differences in France and England shows that neither the universalist (French) nor the communitarian (English) approach is entirely satisfactory in promoting the ideals of equality and equity (Doyle 2006). A risk of discrimination and segregation always remains.

The policies of any given institution are never autonomous and merely inherent to the system in which they are embedded. Strategies change depending on social, economic and political developments on a macro-level, as exemplified by comparative research on educational systems (Watson 1998). The increasing demands of globalisation and of supranational organisations impact

the discourse on diversity regarding educational policy. Presently, there are two opposing tendencies which cancel each other out: the rhetoric of celebrating diversity on the one hand and the practice to dismiss diversity in favour of Neo-Assimilationism on the other hand (Allemann-Ghionda, Deloitte, 2008). The latter is promoted by various and contrasting fundamentalist movements within society and politics. *Mutatis mutandis*, analogous developments in other institutions apart from educational ones can be detected and reconstructed. Appreciation of diversity is the *leitmotiv* of a number of institutional discourses, but implementing this idea is often met with ostracism.

2. *Present Discourses: The paradigm of diversity as a social construct*

Further developments and enhancements of the groundbreaking, enlightened challenging of cultural and religious eurocentrism and of the social order of the *Ancien Régime* can be found in the writings of many authors of the 20th century. Examples for authors reflecting on cultural, ethnic and religious difference and diversity are French ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1983) (France), philosophers Emmanuel Lévinas (1995) (Lithuania and France), Charles Taylor (1993) (Canada), Amy Gutmann (1995) (US) and Amartya Sen (1995) (India, UK, US) as well as Jürgen Habermas (1996) (Germany). From an ethnological-sociological perspective, the extensive empirical studies and theoretical essays on social distinction and on cultural and social capital by Pierre Bourdieu (1979, 1986) (France) have contributed greatly to the documentation and analysis of those mechanisms for distinction and exclusion which are used to construct difference, to consolidate social status and to exclude the less privileged.

Among Anglo-American scholars, interest in cultural difference has spawned programmes of reform in education as early as the 1930s. These programmes considered interculturality as an integral dimension of democratic education (McGee Banks 2011). However, these concepts were only truly promoted within politics and society with the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement, leading to supporters around the globe for the idea of multicultural education. The European equivalent for this concept is intercultural education. The Anglo-American discourse has departed from multiculturalism – a concept biased by ethnicism – towards a more complex discussion with diversity as its keyword (Banks 2004). A similar development can be retraced in Europe, specifically in Western Europe, as Eastern Europe has only entered this discussion after the downfall of the Soviet Union (Bleszynska 2011). While first instances of intercultural education struggled with the search for a definition of cultural difference or to what extent cultural relativism could be employed, the perspective was gradually extended towards a pedagogy of diversity which went beyond ethno-cultural differences (Porcher, Abdallah-Preteille 1998; Allemann-Ghionda 2002 and 2009).

A trend can be observed, from the last third of the 20th century onwards, to consider the original focus on cultural plurality and difference (or equity) under the expanded aspect of acceptance and equitable distribution of power. Approaches formerly employed separately and parallel – on one side the discourse on social classes, strata and milieus, on a second side debates on gender, on another side a focus on ethnic and cultural differences (which gave rise to intercultural education and to multiculturalism as an ideology and a policy) or the debates on ability and disability, sexual orientation and finally on hybrid identities (Bronfen, Marius 1997) and the patchwork of postmodern identities (Keupp et al. 2002) – have successively merged to a comprehensive, multi-layered view of diversity, albeit different authors continue to pursue individual emphases.

According to modern understanding in social sciences (which of course does not exclude that other disciplines not defined as studies in social sciences contribute similar viewpoints), plurality and diversity include a number of characteristics, some of which are innate while others are acquired

individually or attributed through spontaneous or guided group processes, policies and institutional practice. Notable characteristics are (in no particular order and without claim to be exhaustive):

- socio-economic status (linked to educational level),
- ethnic and socio-cultural affiliation (self-ascription / ascription by others),
- nationality and citizenship,
- sex and gender,
- sexual orientation,
- age,
- ability / disability as well as physical and emotional well-being or health,
- skin-colour and other apparent physical features,
- religion, faith and spirituality.

In this arrangement, all attributes of difference share the feature that they cannot appear in isolation – nobody is exclusively female or young or black or healthy or a national of a specific country – but will always occur in combination. Accordingly, the term ‘minority’ is complex and dynamic with affiliations and differences being broached as issues through individual identity formation, through social interaction (individual- and group-behaviour) or through institutional practice. With the intent of a conscious or unconscious defence of power and privileges, stereotypes are coined and open or veiled discrimination, which is differentiated further by the creation of terms such as racism, sexism, etc., is employed. In this spirit, a programmatic publication is titled *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: Racism, Sexism, Anti-Semitism, Heterosexism, Classism, and Ableism* (Adams et al. 2000).¹ The phenomenon that attributes or differences never occur in isolation but as merging or crossing lines of difference, has been called intersectionality (Krüger-Potratz, Lutz 2002). Negative discrimination is juxtaposed with the term positive discrimination, a concept which can lead to specific policies and institutional practice.

The significance of the various attributes which can lead to distinction and discrimination has changed over the years and is considered differently according to scholars’ approaches and exploratory focus. From the perspective of psychologist and social scientist Carmel Camilleri, culture (i.e. cultural belonging and cultural difference) has become an important analytical category during the course of the 20th century – at least as important as social origin, age, sex and gender (Camilleri 1995). This perspective explains the emergence of terms such as intercultural, multicultural, cross-cultural or transcultural.

For a number of sociologists, ethnic affiliation of migrants and the adjunctive discourse on difference and diversity is an overrated phenomenon of social construction. According to these scholars, the more important issue is socio-economic disparity (Bukow, Llaryora 1998; Bukow 2011). Others consider the diversity of present migration neither exclusively with regards to ethnicity nor to socio-economic background. Vertovec’s concept of super-diversity emphasises a wide scope of variables, which need to be considered when describing migration as it is today. According to this concept, the term multicultural can no longer grasp this complexity, as it refers to a type of more homogenous migration, defined more by socio-economic background as well as by the number of destinations and countries of origin, which was characteristic for migration in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet even regarding those decades, it would be misguided, according to Vertovec, not to consider ethnicity (Chantzi 2009). The history of the 20th century has shown: whenever individuals or groups, defining themselves as members of an ethnic minority and being defined as such by a majority, are bereft of their eco-cultural environment and forcefully assimilated in the name of political doctrine,

¹ The absence of a number of other „-isms“, such as ageism, may be a coincidence more than a conscious statement. While the specification of age in applications and résumés is usually required in Germany, it is neither common nor requested in the US, thus possibly making ageism a less potent issue in North America than it is in Germany. In the US, discrimination due to age is not only considered as ethically unjustifiable, but is also punishable by law.

as it occurred in the Soviet Union for example, social and individual repercussions and disadvantages are the consequence (Allemann 2010).

The scholarly discourse on difference (starting with cultural difference) has experienced a paradigm-shift during the 20th century. Four main points of argument, which can also be understood as stages of development, become evident: Firstly, denying cultural plurality in the name of assimilation; secondly, multiculturalism; thirdly, downplaying cultural difference in favour of socio-economic issues; fourthly, including any difference (including socio-cultural) into the multi-layered concept of diversity (Allemann-Ghionda 2002, p. 487 ff.).

The present stance of scholarly discussion of diversity can be summarised as follows: The term diversity has developed from an emphasis of ethnocultural considerations towards a broader understanding and inclusion of a plurality of difference-markers (Dietz 2007). However, the ethno-cultural focus still has its proponents. According to the electronic “Diversity Dictionary”, diversity is

“(... a) situation that includes representation of multiple (ideally all) groups within a prescribed environment, such as a university or a workplace. This word most commonly refers to differences between cultural groups, although it is also used to describe differences within cultural groups, e.g. diversity within the Asian-American culture includes Korean Americans and Japanese Americans. An emphasis on accepting and respecting cultural differences by recognizing that no one culture is intrinsically superior to another underlies the current usage of the term.” (Diversity Dictionary 2009)

Critique of exactly this culturalisation and essentialisation of diversity has been a part of scholarly debate for decades, stemming from different ideological points of view. A prominent progressive critical approach is brought into the discussion by scholars of post-colonial studies. Institutional multiculturalism, inspired by a narrow definition of diversity, which emphasises the construction of communities, has been practiced at a number of North-American universities, in some instances to an extreme, even segregating extent (especially during the 1980s), as a preference for ethnic minorities was put on curricula and matriculation. This emphasis on minorities was and is accompanied by the controversial practice of quota regulation. The caricaturing perception of multiculturalism and its underlying philosophy are described as a new variety of colonialism by the proponents of post-colonial studies: While the orientalism of the Enlightenment and of 19th century colonialism culturalised the exotic “Other”, multiculturalism, in its focus on ethnicity, leads to a similar reification of the “other” despite its emancipatory intent (Said 1997; on the criticism against post-colonial studies as well as on the critique of the criticism: Hall 1997). Several authors have also contributed to the debate from a conservative perspective (i.e. a stance that regards diversity neither as “normal” nor as desirable or advantageous), criticising what they consider to be negative consequences of an ideology and policy of diversity and of positive discrimination (D’Souza 1991; Wood 2003).

3. Concluding remarks

It was a long way until the phenomenon of human diversity became a topic for rational analysis and, consequently, for an explicit rationale in politics which ideally would regard and treat all human beings as of equal dignity and as unconditionally worthy of respect. Depending on the context, the concept of diversity can be used as a descriptive or as a normative one. The concept of diversity is inherently contradictory: is it better for individuals or groups which are seen as different by some “normal” majority to be treated in special ways, or should they be treated equally without any particular attention to whatever needs they may objectively or subjectively have or express? And finally, and perhaps most fundamentally, the concept of diversity has two faces: One face is the “pure” or ethic one, derived from the idea of human rights. The other face is utilitarian. In this

version, understanding and accepting “other” ways of life is supposed to serve a goal. In the sixteenth century, understanding the Aztecs’ culture was not only a scholarly approach, but above all (or to the same degree) a pre-condition for their Christianization. In today’s secular societies, the concept of diversity is used as a tool to encourage social cohesion while minimizing conflicts, or even to run enterprises in more efficient ways (Stuber, 2009). In other words: celebrating diversity may even be used as a device for selling more cars.

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