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LIVING TOGETHER *IN* DIVERSITY.

A JOURNEY FROM SCHOLARLY VIEWS TO PEOPLE'S VOICES
AND BACK

Abstract

One of the most pressing and challenging questions which contemporary societies are facing today is how to reconcile social unity with ethno-cultural, racial, and religious diversity.

While scholars have largely investigated the ways in which diversity is excluded and marginalized, relatively fewer studies have been conducted on how diversity can also be socially included. How can we live together *in* diversity? This article offers an interdisciplinary account of how scholars have responded to this question, while also analyzing the ways in which their answers find resonance among people's voices, collected in four European regions. Moving from scholarly perspectives to people's voices and back, the article cautions against both the liberal/republican/civic approach which heralds political principles as the ties that can bind diverse people together and the factual/post-foundational approach which, being skeptical towards principles, values, and identities, looks for answers in everyday encounters and practices. While the former remains indeed blind to the ways in which people imbue political principles with cultural values, the latter tend to obliterate how

the everyday is often a terrain where to practice and assess cultural similarity. However elusive and always context-specific the answers to ‘living together *in* diversity’ might be, the article calls for a continuous journey between the normative and the factual/post-foundational, while remaining constantly open to people’s voices.

Key-words: unity; diversity; everyday; multiculturalism; hospitality; inclusion

1. Introduction

“Multiculturalism is out and social cohesion is in” (Castles, 2011: 23). This statement by one of the main authors in migration studies might certainly sound trenchant, if not provocative. Yet, it aims to capture the tendency within contemporary public discourses to increasingly stress the need for social unity at the expense of ethno-cultural diversity (Eriksen and Stjernfelt, 2012). Even if one might disagree with Castles (2011: 26) that multiculturalism as a term, if not even as a policy, ‘is beyond rescue’ – a view partly shared also by another influential scholar (Kymlicka, 2012: 214) – the idea that cultural and religious needs of minority groups should be institutionally acknowledged and accommodated is today under question in many Western countries. The banning of the ‘burqa’ from public spaces in France and in Belgium, the Swiss referendum on the construction of minarets, the ‘muscular liberalism’ of the British Prime Minister David Cameron, the deportation of Roma from France and other European countries, and the rise of xenophobic attacks in Australia are just a few, highly mass-mediatised episodes pointing to a generalized anti-migrant/anti-diversity attitude (Vasta, 2009). This has in turn fed a backlash against multiculturalism widely discussed within the literature (see, among others, Brubaker, 2001; Bauböck, 2002; Joppke, 2004; Grillo, 2007; McGhee, 2008; Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010). Conversely,

calls for a renewed sense of national identity have been heard in various countries and, interestingly enough, have also been echoed by scholars who have championed multicultural policies. Thus, for instance, Modood (2007; 2011) talks explicitly of a ‘remaking of national identity’, the construction of a new collective ‘we’, inclusive of all diversities, around which a multicultural society can be held together.

The purpose of the present article is neither to discuss the recent backlash against multiculturalism nor to analyze the new wave of social cohesion and integration policies. Rather, it aims to explore the ways in which the question of ‘living together *in* diversity’ within contemporary national societies finds expression both within academic scholarship and the public. My use of ‘*in*’ rather than the more common ‘*with*’ is a tactical move to go beyond a hegemonic discourse which implicitly assumes that diversity is something carried solely by migrants and that ‘we’ have somewhat to live *with*, i.e. to tolerate ‘them’ – an assumption which also reduces the growing ethno-cultural mixing of contemporary societies into two essentialized categories. Obviously, tolerance is just one of the many possible ways to address ethno-cultural and religious diversity. Stressing ‘*in*’ aims exactly to open up space for a reflection on the diverse ways to imagine and narrate ideas of togetherness in multicultural societies.

The article is divided in two main parts. In the first part, I offer an account of how togetherness in diversity has been theorized by scholars, paying particular attention to the contributions of political philosophy – a perspective highly relevant to the question of living together in diversity, yet also relatively little practiced among geographers, who tend instead to address the same question through the lenses of cultural studies and social theory. The second part compares and contrasts people’s opinions collected, in four European regions,

around the main question: “*what is the social glue that can keep a society together when it becomes more and more diverse?*”. In the conclusion, I reflect on the challenges which the dirty and messy terrain of people’s lives poses to both normative and factual approaches.

2. Searching for the ties that bind

Among scholars, diversity is often debated in relation to issues of exclusion, discrimination, segregation, or marginalization. In other words, the emphasis is frequently on what divides rather than what brings people together (Transue, 2007). As observed by Cameron (2006: 396-397), while social exclusion has been a topic largely investigated and theorized, social inclusion has remained somewhat merely implied and often defined only negatively - as whatever is not socially excluded.

The purpose of this section is to offer a systematic view of the ways in which scholars from different disciplines have reflected on the question of living together in diversity. I should clarify that I use here the term ‘diversity’ as referring exclusively to ethno-cultural, racial and religious variation among people, leaving out other categories (gender, age, class, sexuality, dis-ability, etc.), which also populate social diversity. Moreover, I use ‘diversity’ in a rather descriptive manner, as a way to account for the above mentioned variation, without investigating the power dynamics at work within the very formation of these categories and without loading this term with any positive or negative value, as for instance in some debate between ‘diversity’ and ‘difference’ (Kobayashi, 1997; Eriksen, 2006; Modood, 2011).

I would argue that scholarly ‘answers’ to the above question can be divided into two groups, in relation to whether they privilege what I call ‘normative’ or ‘factual’ approaches. The normative approach relies on some foundational principles (e.g., justice, common good,

shared identity) around which social life can be organized. It is normative in the sense that it offers prescriptions on how institutions *should* be, what values and principles *should* be promoted, how people *should* behave, etc. It obviously presents an ideal configuration towards which societies should tend, but it does not necessarily incorporate how ‘living together *in diversity*’ *actually* takes place. This, instead, is the focus of what can be labeled ‘the factual approach’. Rather than focusing on principles and values, this approach privileges individual and social practices, as well as personal dispositions. Within this perspective, the ties that bind people together, if any, should be searched in the empathic and situational meetings among individuals. Not surprisingly, the focus is often on the micro-scale of the locale, as this is the locus where everyday encounters might generate feelings of togetherness.

I should note that the above distinction does not merely reproduce the familiar ‘normative vs. empirical’ dichotomy. In fact, I would argue that within the factual approach, various authors also share a sort of skepticism towards big principles and meta-narratives as foundations for society-building. In this sense, their looking at people’s small acts in everyday life is not a mere attempt to study empirically the living together in diversity, but also a consequence of this ‘post-foundational’ skepticism. Henceforth, I shall then use the label ‘factual/post-foundational’ to identify this approach.

Finally, I should note that this distinction of approaches should be regarded as a way to better illuminate the variety of scholarly ‘answers’ given to the question of living together in diversity, rather than an attempt at drawing fixed and impermeable intellectual or paradigmatic boundaries.

2.1 The normative approach

The view that societies need some foundational ground is largely shared by scholars. The question is obviously what these foundational principles should be. I would argue that a discriminating factor within the normative approach is whether these principles should remain confined within the political sphere or they should incorporate and reflect the cultural values of a community. When analyzed in these terms, I believe that one can locate contributions emanating from political liberalism, republicanism and civic nationalism within the ‘political’ normative camp and contributions from communitarianism, liberal nationalism, and multiculturalism within the ‘culturalist’ normative camp. In the following two sections I shall details how each of these normative approaches contributes to answer the diversity question. Due to space constraints, I shall limit my treatment of the literature to what is strictly necessary for the purpose of the present article.

2.1.2 The ‘political’ normative approach

Within this perspective, an additional distinction can be operated between those views which prioritize the autonomy of the individual over communal frameworks and those which instead value political community and its institutions over individual autonomy. Political liberalism, as mainly theorized by Rawls (1993), epitomizes the first of these two strands. According to political liberalism, what holds a society together is a sense of justice, which is associated, among others, with notions of fairness and equal opportunities. A well ordered society is one where everyone accepts and has an effective sense of principles of (liberal) justice (Rawls, 1993: 35). Accordingly, the goal should be to educate everybody to justice, fairness, mutual tolerance, and respect (Føllesdal, 2010). People’s diversity, in cultural

or other terms, is not a relevant dimension for a just society, made of free, autonomous and equal individuals. What matters is redistribution (of resources) rather than recognition (of difference) and the state should remain culturally neutral, abstaining from espousing any particular conception of the good (Quong, 2004).

Departing from the emphasis on individual autonomy heralded by political liberalism, the second strand of the normative political perspective emphasizes political institutions, as well as political membership, loyalty, and attachment as key factors in binding a society together. This view finds its main resonance with the tenets of republicanism and civic nationalism.

According to republicanism, it is a sense of ‘belonging to the polity’ rather than ‘belonging together’, i.e. a shared identity, which draws diverse people together (Mason, 1999; Abizadeh, 2004). Contrary to the liberal idea that individuals are naturally entitled with rights, republicans argue that it is exactly the state the source of these rights (Pettit, 1997; Skinner, 1998). Thus, the individual has a moral obligation towards the state, to which s/he owes her/his freedom. In the interpretation of Viroli (1995), this loyalty should also be accompanied by a civic virtue, understood as a charitable and generous love for the common liberty and the political institutions which sustain it.

Given the stress on civic virtue and public spiritedness, the notion of citizenship qua political participation plays a key role in republicanism (Kymlicka, 2002: 285-287). This notion has been increasingly adopted across a variety of disciplines – e.g., geography (Nagel and Staeheli, 2008), urban studies (Isin, 2000) and sociology (Favell, 2001) – as the principle around which to hold diverse societies together. In its post-national (Soysal, 1994) or transnational (Bader, 1997) conceptualization, it clearly shares with republicanism the

decoupling between rights (political membership) and identity (cultural or national affiliation). Yet, the idea of post-national/transnational citizenship relies upon the liberal moral claim of universal or natural human rights (Benhabib, 2002: 152) and as such it contrasts with the republican idea of 'global citizenship' (Bohman, 2004), which relies instead on the existence of a global political community (Halldenius, 2010). In this sense, they hint at two different versions of cosmopolitanism as a socially transformative project.

Both the liberal decoupling of the political from the cultural and the republican emphasis on the notion of citizenship as political membership and participation are at the basis of civic nationalism. The civic nation is meant to be indifferent to cultural diversity, being indeed a community defined and delimited only by the legal and political status of citizenship and its adherence to political principles (Miller, 1995: 195; Brubaker, 1996: 44; Kymlicka, 2002: 345-346). These latter are generally believed to be the liberal principles of justice, freedom, equality, fairness, tolerance and respect. Within this perspective, any notion of peoplehood exists not as a pre-political dimension, but as the potential result of an active process of engagement into the public sphere (Calhoun, 2002).

According to Joppke (2008), civic nationalism is the incontrovertible trend for many European states. In the United Kingdom, for instance, since the urban unrests of 2001, civic values have been promoted, within the framework of social cohesion policies, as "the fundamental glue that holds us together" (Phillips, 2007: 42). Critics of this idea, however, point to the fact that any civic nation-state embodies the cultural values and practices of the majoritarian group (Kymlicka, 2001; Bader, 2005). Moreover, by invoking the ethnically and culturally neutral dimension of the state and the de-culturalization of 'us', civic nationalism implicitly rejects any cultural claims from ethnic minorities and prevents their integration by

relegating and reifying ‘them’ into their culturalized practices (Gressgård, 2010: 9-10; Kymlicka, 2011: 292). This also explains why civic nationalism and any other normative discourse which relies on republican citizenship to generate social unity might be inadequate, since being a citizen is no guarantee against socio-economic exclusion.

2.1.2 The ‘culturalist’ normative approach

This approach loosely groups a variety of perspectives which share the belief that a society cannot be held together only by political principles or a political culture. Keeping the political (public) and the cultural (private) separated is criticized as artificial (Canovan, 2000; Parekh, 2000; Kymlicka, 2002). In real life – the argument goes – people cling to their cultural affiliations and however imagined or constructed collective identities might be, they are not less ‘real’ or important for them (Walzer quoted in Orlie, 1999: 145). Political principles alone would not suffice to generate feelings of trust and solidarity among the members of a polity – feelings deemed essential for justifying redistributive policies within a democratic setting (Baumeister, 2007). A common ‘we’ feeling is necessary and this can emerge out of a common way of life (communitarianism), a shared national identity (liberal nationalism) or a composite and plural national identity (multiculturalism).

Communitarian scholars were the first to voice the importance of culture, criticizing the liberal view of the culturally unencumbered and disembodied self.¹ Among others, Taylor (1989) argued that equality (the liberal idea of the universal individual) cannot be a substitute for recognition (the culturally located individual). Community is a structural precondition of human agency and selfhood (Mulhall and Swift, 1992: 121). Accordingly, what binds people together is a shared substantive idea of the common good, the community’s ‘way of life’,

which informs both moral values and political principles and towards which the state cannot be neutral (Kymlicka, 2002: 220, 257).

Both liberal nationalism and multiculturalism share the communitarian concern for culture and they both stress a common nationhood as the founding principle around which to bring diverse people together. Although liberal nationalism and, even more so, multiculturalism refer to a plurality of positions, I believe that a discriminating factor is how they conceive cultural diversity, which in turn influences their conceptualization of national identity.² From a liberal nationalist perspective, cultural diversity is something to be 'fixed', either by providing minorities with special rights so to enhance their public participation (Kymlicka, 2001) or, in a more civic nationalist tone, by treating ethnicity as a private cultural phenomenon (Miller, 2000: 122, 137). As a consequence, the type of national identity envisioned to maintain social unity in a pluralistic state is rather 'thin', based on sharing liberal values (Miller, 1995), common language and shared history (Kymlicka, 2001: 312-315).

Multiculturalism adopts a different stance towards cultural diversity and, consequently, national identity. According to one of its most renowned exponents (Parekh 2000: 340), multiculturalism relies on the inescapability and desirability of cultural diversity. Parekh (2000: 172) explicitly recognizes that the good life can be led in several different ways. Thus, he criticizes the pretense of liberalism to present itself as the 'right' way, dismissing as illiberal all other views which do not abide to its principles. For Parekh (2000: 235-236), what binds a society together is a plural and inclusive national identity, based on a composite culture constituted through intercultural dialogue. Contra national liberalism, this project does not 'take off', but 'add' ethno-cultural diversity to national identity (Modood and Meer,

2012: 52), which should then be understood as an overarching shared identity built upon diversity (Bauböck, 2002; Uberoi, 2007; Modood, 2011).

2.2. The factual/post-foundational approach

Within this approach the answer to the question of how to live together in diversity is not searched amongst principles and values, but practices and personal dispositions. The focus is not on how people *should/can* live together, but how they *actually* live together. In some authors, this approach is also accompanied by a more or less explicit skepticism towards meta-narratives, stressing instead the contingency and instability of any solution (Gressgård, 2010). In this sense, the factual approach might at times translate into a post-foundational view, suspicious of principles, values, and identities *tout court*. Factual and post-foundational often overlap, although this does not obviously exclude the possibility that a factual investigation might also be used to inform or test a normative argument.

Within the factual/post-foundational approach, two factors often come to the fore: sharing space and personal dispositions. These two dimensions are actually interdependent, in the sense that sharing space might at times produce and being produced by favorable personal dispositions towards the Other. Yet, once again, for explanatory clarity, I shall present them separately.

Writing in the tradition of social psychology and its contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), geographers in particular have remarked the importance of sharing space to generate inter-personal encounters, which in turn might help overcoming ethno-cultural and racial prejudice (Valentine, 2008; Matejskova and Leitner, 2011; Leitner, 2012). Sharing space allows for the prosaic negotiation of difference in everyday life, generating a sense of

togetherness (Ang, 2011), commonality (Stacheli, 2008), or common ground (Ahmed and Fortier, 2003), beyond shared beliefs, principles, or identities.

More than others, Amin (2006) has argued for the importance of micro-publics of everyday social contact to engender a politics of connectivity or, in Gilroy's (2004) terms, 'conviviality' – a dwelling in close proximity which makes racial and ethnic difference look ordinary, part of a cosmopolitan culture. For Amin (2002), these micro-publics are mainly sites of compulsory mundane interaction, such as the workplace, schools, colleges, sport clubs, etc. This is where the kind of 'throwntogetherness' in the city described by Massey (2005: 181) generates 'happenings' that bring people together through the common experience of what Thrift (2005: 144) calls 'belonging to a situation'. The banality of ordinary, small acts like holding open doors, making queues, and sharing seats (Laurier and Philo, 2006) are all occasional interactions with strangers with whom we come to share public spaces – low-level sociability which might generate 'weak ties' (Buonfino and Thomson, 2007). In this sense, convivial habitual practices of everyday life (Felski, 1999-2000; Fortier 2008), in their very ordinary (Stacheli et al., 2012) and boring (Ehrkamp, 2012) happening, can be regarded as ways of 'doing' togetherness in diversity (Laurier and Philo, 2006).

These banal, ordinary acts bring forward the importance of personal dispositions, among which a sense of hospitality has attracted particular attention, as a catalyst for attitudes of care, openness, and relatedness towards the Other (Amin, 2012). Living together in diversity becomes possible through these individual dispositions, filled with both ethical and affective content. According to Gillian (1982) and Tronto (1993), an ethical caring is one which attends to the situational needs of specific individuals rather than to universal (liberal)

principles (Kymlicka, 2002: 403). In the influential writings of Levinas and Derrida, it is an ethic of responsibility towards the Other, which nevertheless is always conditioned by – and in need to overcome – the territorializing logic associated with hospitality itself (Barnett, 2005; Popke, 2007).

Following Nancy's notion of *clinamen* (inclination towards others), other authors have instead privileged a more affective dimension of hospitality. Diprose (2008), for instance, speaks of communities made of affective bodies inclined one towards the other in a pre-reflective, felt, and lived dimension of belonging together and to places. This affective dimension clearly goes beyond the mere 'civility' which regulates inter-personal exchanges in liberal societies (Kymlicka, 2002: 302) – also in terms of civil indifference towards difference (Young, 1986) or civil inattention (Goffman, 1972) – and which more recently has resurfaced in the literature as a way to answer the question of living together in diversity (Boyd, 2006).

Understood as an ethic of care and responsibility, the notion of hospitality can clearly translate into a normative approach. It points indeed to what the 'right' dispositions *should* be. Yet, within this approach, there is a wide disillusionment with any foundational principles. Echoing Lyotard, Gressgård (2010: 136) does not deny that we are in need of foundations to ground the social, but she believes that this quest is impossible – due to the radical impossibility of ultimate grounds. Thus, an unreserved openness towards the Other becomes the only condition for a community based on difference, for being together without 'common being', for being bonded without bonds (Gressgård, 2010: 85-86), in very post-foundational terms.

3. Listening to the voices on the ground

Qualitative data used in this study are part of a larger research project on the relationship between territory and identity in the age of globalization. Data were collected in four European regions (Lombardia, Italy; Pirkanmaa, Finland; North-East England, United Kingdom; and Languedoc-Roussillon, France), during the period May 2005 and January 2006, by generating a sample of interviewees representative of all political parties active in each regions. Additional interviews were administered with representatives of labor and entrepreneurial organizations, civic officers and community organization members. Overall, ninety-nine people were interviewed: twenty-five in Pirkanmaa, twenty-five in Languedoc-Roussillon, twenty in Lombardy and twenty-nine in the North-East England. The number of the interviewees was not proportional to the size of the regional population, but it was aimed at capturing opinions across the whole political spectrum in a rather even number for the four regions under consideration. Interviewees were mostly men (seventy-one). Age varied widely, with the median value in the low 50s. The majority of the interviewees belonged to the middle-class, while ethnically they all belonged to the majority group. The question relevant for this study (*what is the social glue that can keep a society together when it becomes more and more diverse?*) came towards the end of a semi-structured interview, touching on various aspects of the transformation of contemporary societies within the context of globalization broadly understood.

Following King et al. (1994), the selection of the regional case-studies was made in order to avoid the bias which would have derived from sampling on the degree of territorial attachment – the dependent variable of the larger mixed-method study from which the present article originates.³ Besides representing various geographical and socio-economic

conditions in Western Europe, the four selected regions also show different characteristics with regard to the ethno-cultural diversity of their populations. North-East England and Languedoc-Roussillon belong to traditional countries of immigration, whereas Lombardia and Pirkanmaa to countries which only in recent decades (Italy) and in the last few years only (Finland) have started receiving foreign immigrants, having been previously countries of emigration themselves.⁴ However, this is not reflected in the percentages of foreign citizens living in the selected regions. In fact, both North-East England (2.2%) and Pirkanmaa (1.7%) are regions with a low presence of foreign citizens, when compared to Lombardia (7.1%) and Languedoc-Roussillon (5.7%).⁵

Overall, the interviewees reproduced the scholarly arguments discussed above. Yet, they also blurred the distinction between the political and the cultural, as well as between principles and practices.

3.1 Meandering through ‘the political’ and ‘the cultural’

Although not in many instances, principles of liberty, equality, fairness, respect and tolerance surfaced in the accounts of the respondents. Equality of opportunities, in particular, was a theme which repeatedly entered the conversations with leftist French interviewees. This is not surprising given the fact that issues of integration in France are generally explained in terms of socio-economic discrimination, eschewing deliberately any reference to notions of recognition (Body-Gendrot, 2002). As put by a local representative of the French socialist party,

“I am completely convinced that the day in which we will solve the problem of employment, wearing the scarf will become a minor issue, the mosques will become a minor issue. Employment and housing – this is what we need.”

This approach to diversity in terms of redistribution was also accompanied by a focus on the so-called *aménagement du territoire* (regional and urban planning), since spatial segregation was said to prevent ‘social and cultural mixing’, listed in turn as a factor that can keep a society together. Thus, fighting economic and housing discrimination was high on the agenda of the leftist French interviewees, as the following account by a trade union representative exemplifies:

“Work is the social glue. To work gives you the opportunity to have a life like the others... you participate to the development of the country and to your own development. You can buy, you can consume, etc. Those who don’t work, don’t know this... And here we have people who have just lived one thing: their grand parents who were in ghettos and served the French in low-skilled occupations, their parents who were unemployed and they who don’t have any future, as they are also unemployed”.

Employment and housing were said to bring people together as they make them equal subjects, thus creating the conditions for inter-personal contacts – a reasoning blind, though,

to the racialization of social relations produced by France's post-colonial legacy (Dikeç, 2007).

Tolerance and respect were also mentioned quite a few times, particularly among British interviewees. Like in the French case, the tendency was also to reproduce the national mainstream discourse, since public policies surrounding race relations in Britain have long promoted notions of tolerance and respect – they “are part of the British psyche”, according to one interviewee. Yet, tolerance and respect were not simply mobilized as expression of liberal civility. More often, they helped preserving cultural distance; to put diverse people at a safe distance so to avoid any meaningful encounter. Consider, for instance, the following remark by an English local councillor of an independent political group:

“The guy that runs a shop [in my village] is Algerian, but he is accepted by me, he does his own thing, he does not bother me, he does not bother anybody, he is accepted, there is no question.”

Acceptance as a form of respect is made possible by preserving a certain social distance. Rather than being a mere political and moral principle reflecting the moral equality of human beings (Boyd, 2006), respect here communicates and reproduces the existence of (ethno-cultural) boundaries which should not be trespassed – ‘don't bother me’, ‘you stay there I stay here’... ‘parallel lives’, indeed (Home Office, 2001). As observed by another British interviewee: “respect is the only source for the absence of problems”. While equality of opportunities, as presented by French interviewees, might favor a positive commonality

based on inter-cultural exchanges, respect, as it resonated among British interviewees, could only lead to a form of negative commonality – commonality as absence of problems.

Besides equality, tolerance, and respect, democracy and the constitution were also mentioned by respondents in all the four regions. These republican principles, however, were not always confined within the political realm, but were at times imbued with an even more explicit ethno-culturalist tone than the one implied in the ‘don’t bother me’ attitude:

“I think it is important to respect our law, our *laïcité* [secularism]. If they chose to come to France, well they have to.

And if you have to define what are the most important elements upon which to build a society...

Well, it’s the... the respect of... as I said... to respect the law, our law and I would say... to respect the law... that’s it.

And do you think this is enough?

Yes absolutely, because education... the role of the school and the economy should do the rest.”

As this quote by a French employers’ representative suggests, liberal/republican principles are not culturally neutral – they are ‘*our* law’, ‘*our* secularism’. However abstract and universal might sound, they are historically and geographically grounded and operate as identity markers for an ethno-culturally defined people. Both republicans (Habermas, 2001: 107) and political liberals (Føllesdal, 2010) somewhat acknowledge this point, affirming that universal liberal values are always interpreted and realized within given, historical societies.

Yet, I would argue, they both overlook the ways in which this contextualization process also implicates and is implicated into processes of collective identity formation along ethno-cultural lines. ‘*Our* law’ is not only constitutive of a people in political terms, since this people has come to define itself through historical events and in a geographical space, both filled with notions of culture, ethnicity, and race, among others. Thus, to herald *our* liberal political principles as the glue that can keep a society together amounts to a demand of ethno-cultural assimilation. Not surprisingly, liberalism is sometimes regarded with skepticism by minority groups, which consider it as a renewed expression of a Western civilizing mission (Parekh, 2000: 178). In a few cases, particularly among conservative interviewees, the moral superiority of ‘our values’, ‘our constitution’ was indeed clearly remarked. Interestingly enough, no negotiation process was admitted regarding these principles. The assumption that they are somewhat universal put them in a safe box, away from any inter-cultural debate. People should simply be educated to them, thus giving a key role to schooling, as seen in the quote above and as heard in other interviews. Assimilation into ‘*our* liberal principles’ remains, therefore, an impossible endeavor, insofar as an ethno-cultural connotation (*our*) remains structurally embedded into those principles.

Interviewees also referred to another republican principle as a factor of social unity – civic responsibility or participation. To pay taxes, to contribute to the economic and intellectual development of the country, to defend it against external threats were mentioned in all four regions. This clearly resonates with the republican commitment to the polity which guarantees our freedom – besides our ‘well-being’, ‘welfare’, and ‘quality of life’, as also noted by the respondents. Quite often, associated with this view, was also the idea of sharing a common project (‘what we want to achieve together’), which was frequently

articulated in economic terms ('prosperity', 'success', etc.), but for a few leftist respondents was also dependent on cultural values. As noted by an Italian trade union representative:

"These common projects cannot only be about creating a prosperous economy. If we create more welfare what do we do with it? To decide what to do, we have to rely on our cultural values, what we believe is good in this world... economic dimension or mutual respect are necessary... but it's not all".

From this perspective, the political and the cultural, once again, cannot be separated. Working for a collective project requires decisions which are informed by ethical values – what we believe a 'good life' should be, as communitarians would put it.

Among the interviewees who more explicitly privileged a culturalist view, the general tendency was to refer to 'cultural similarity', thus prompting demands of acculturation/assimilation. This emerged rather consistently among all interviewees, irrespective of their political affiliation. Only for a few respondents a culturalist perspective meant the re-working of a common national culture. In this case, the majority culture was not viewed as something fixed, but as in evolution through a continuous historical process of cultural cross-fertilization.

3.2 Everyday as acculturation

The importance of everyday practices and encounters clearly emerged from the accounts of numerous respondents across the case studies. Working together, sitting on the

same school benches, being a member of the same sport club, participating to the activities of community centers were said, by quite a few interviewees, to generate social links among diverse people. In the words of an Italian representative of a voluntary organization,

“I think we should have the good sense to understand that we are living together ... we do form a community in the everyday life, which is surely made of rights and duties, but also of shared habits. There is no need to attach ourselves to big ideas around which we would only fight.”

This account clearly echoes the ‘factual’ approach which regards everyday life as imbued with a progressive and inclusive potential. It also shares the ‘post-foundational’ skepticism towards ‘big principles’. For a very few interviewees, this everyday conviviality was also associated with positive inter-personal dispositions. Being open to and welcoming diversity, as well as showing warm feelings to the Other were said to generate ties that could bind diverse people together. These dispositions were animated by a sort of cosmopolitan humanism (‘we are all human beings’), filled with both ethical and affective elements, as for instance in the following quote by a British Labour local councilor:

“I suppose... it’s about being decent people and treat people how you would like to be treated yourself and if you can’t do... good don’t do anything... and maybe this is old fashion value, but I think people lost the sense of caring for the neighbor and I mean neighbor by the bigger

sense of the word... the neighbor in the next street, the neighbor in the next village, the neighbor in the next county... because we are all people at the end of the day.”

When everyday life entered the conversation, though, most often it was portrayed as a way through which majority culture manifests itself. Consider, for instance, the two following comments, by a French civic officer and an English Labour Party politician:

“I think that a common cultural identity is necessary in order to have peace and meaningful exchanges... this identity can be acquired through everyday life, through practices, because it happens in the everyday, because we live, we exchange with others... in France or in the *Midi* there are ways of... how shall I say it?... I cannot find concrete examples, but culture for me is everywhere... the cultural is also our attitude of the everyday.”

“The glue that keeps a society together up here is our sense of identity within our local communities, what we do together... because we live with each other, we go to shop with each other, we go to eat in different kind of restaurants if you like... we go to store together, we work together, we play together.”

In both cases, a place ('France', 'Midi', 'up here') is associated with a certain way of doing things, which marks the identity of that place and demands the acculturation of newcomers. The everyday as a site of acculturation has largely gone unnoticed within the literature, which instead celebrates it as a site of progressive mixing and conviviality. Yet, as Felski (1999-2000) aptly notes, the everyday is constructed out of habits and their repetition, which in turn are key factors in processes of identity formation. As also remarked by Wise (2000), 'who we are' is grounded in the habitual repetition of ways of moving, behaving, gesturing, interacting, etc. Any place, therefore, is not a neutral terrain where diversities can meet on an equal basis, since encounters are mediated and shaped by existing habits and socio-cultural dynamics (see also Valentine, 2008: 333; Matejskova and Leitner, 2011: 736). Places are imbued with ethno-cultural 'ways of doing' and, therefore, the everyday is not immune from culturalist assumptions and expectations. Social life is organized around routinized daily practices, which demarcate in space what is acceptable or not. As referred by an English Liberal-Democrat interviewee:

"I have been living in the place for so long, I know how it works... I go to shop, I see the people, I know how the people might... the mindset of the people. I know what I can do and what I cannot do, I know what is acceptable and what is not acceptable... you sort of... adjust to the way the community works."

Within a given place, mundane activities such as shopping, working, playing, queuing, talking, etc. are regulated by socio-cultural codes which are produced by and reproduce the

identity of the majority group. Not surprisingly, the phrase ‘When in Rome do as the Romans do’ – which implicitly echoes the notion of Britishness as ‘ways of doing’ (Phillips, 2007) – was often heard among English interviewees. Yet, as mentioned above, ‘ways of doing’ and ethno-cultural identity are closely intertwined. This is a point which emerged consistently in the interviews across both the political spectrum and the regional contexts and which is well captured by the following quotes by two center-right politicians, respectively from Finland and Italy:

“The way of life is very important... everyday life, the work... you have to work hard... you have to learn to do the things the way they have been done before - work like the Finns... this is how people are measuring those who come here: are they working or not? Work is the glue.”

“It will be easier to accept the migrant who comes and eats with us the *missoltino* or the *polenta* [typical local dishes], who learn to eat *polenta* with us... we would feel him like one of us more than if we all were to share the same flag”.

In both cases, mundane practices like working and eating together do not produce a multicultural conviviality where diversity is communicated and exchanged, but become a way through which unequal power relations, informed by the hegemony of the majority culture, take place. From this perspective, everyday life becomes synonymous with ‘way of life’, in

communitarian terms. No negotiation process is involved, but a mere act of ‘learning’. ‘They’ should learn how to work and to eat ‘like us’ – a process of incorporation into mainstream ethno-cultural habits, driven by a hierarchical and patronizing logic of power.

Some interviewees also perceived this acculturation process as ‘natural’. Living together, meeting with other parents in school settings or at school-related parties, going to work together, sharing the same public spaces were mentioned as factors which ‘naturally’ bring diverse people into a similar cultural mainstream. As a couple of Italian interviewees mentioned, this acculturation was not something to be planned as necessary, rather a “natural enzymatic process”, through which diversities were “digested” into the social body. The end product was the achievement of a condition of ‘normality’, as the following quote by a Finnish member of a voluntary organization exemplifies:

“when people see that they have a normal life, that they sleep at night, that they don’t have big parties during night time or too noisy, they live as normal people in normal life, they are part of our house... they are accepted as part of the community.”

Normality resonates with a sense of ordinariness, which in turn echoes notions of social order and rules (Staheli et al., 2012). It is exactly in the daily life that a process of similarity comes to the fore. Rather than generating multicultural convivial happenings, everyday practices and encounters become a sort of litmus test to assess the level of cultural similarity, which indeed remained for majority of the interviewees the social glue around which to hold people together.

4. Conclusions

On what to ground a sense of communal belonging is, according to Kymlicka (2002: 257), one of the greatest unresolved questions of our time. To cater for both diversity and social unity is a major challenge since, as Parekh (2000: 235) and Modood (2011: 10) acknowledge, no singular model is likely to be suitable for all groups.

However challenging the above question might be, scholars have nevertheless tried to reflect on how to bring diverse people together. Their answers varies from normative arguments regarding which institutions, principles, and values *should* be put in place to factual approaches which investigate what *actually* takes place, displaying various degrees of skepticism towards big principles and meta-narratives as foundations for society-building.

As a way of grounding the normative views and offering additional empirical evidence to inform the actuality of the 'living together in diversity', this article has incorporated people's voices collected in four regional case studies in Western Europe. To a large extent, these voices echoed the answers discussed by scholars. Yet, they also challenged them on two major accounts. First, the distinction between the political and the cultural – a cornerstone of liberal and republican arguments – did not neatly emerge in the interviewees' narratives, which instead tended to cross this boundary at least on three instances. First, the way respect and tolerance were referred to by some interviewees did not reproduce the liberal principle of civility, understood as a form of acknowledgment of the moral equality of human beings (Boyd, 2006). On the contrary, for some interviewees civil manners served the purpose of putting the Other at distance, reaffirming the existence of ethno-cultural hierarchies and unequal power relations. Second, the constitutional and legal system of the

politics to which the interviewees belonged was also narrated in ethno-culturalist terms.

Rather than standing as mere political principles, capable of bringing diverse people together by exactly ignoring their diversities, the constitution and the law were appropriated by the interviewees as ‘ours’, implicitly activating an exclusionary ‘we vs. them’ logic. Third, civic participation – a key principle of republicanism – was also challenged in its pretension to happen in a cultural vacuum. To contribute to the development of the common polity – some interviewees observed – requires sharing a common cultural vision (‘what kind of society we want to be’).

The second major account on which the interviewees challenged scholarly views concerns the distinction between the normative and the factual. For many interviewees across the political spectrum and regional contexts, everyday practices and daily encounters did not generate a multicultural conviviality. On the contrary, they were understood in terms of acculturation: ways through which migrants can ‘learn’ mainstream cultural habits and in turn be assessed on their level of cultural similarity. This clearly challenges the factual/post-foundational’s idea about the progressive inclusiveness of the everyday, linking instead mundane, daily acts with normative ideals of cultural similarity.

What shall one infer from this comparison between scholarly views and people’s voices? Obviously, one cannot blame the normative for not engaging in empirical analysis and the other way round. Yet, if anything else, this article reveals the importance of constantly grounding scholarly views, however normative or factual/post-foundational might be, on the dirty and messy terrain of people’s lives. Not because the answer to the question of living together in diversity has to be found here, as many scholars who celebrates the everyday would maintain (see, for instance, Castles, 2011: 26). The everyday celebrated in

these terms would in fact pay little attention to people's demand for principles, values, and identities, which also inform mundane encounters with the Other. Similarly, the lack of engagement with the terrain would keep normative views blind to how the same principles, values, and identities are appropriated, understood, and activated in the everyday life. It would be a view blind to the emotional, interactive ways in which those principles, values, and identities take on specific meanings, often different from the ones normatively devised. That is why moving constantly between the normative and the factual/post-foundational, while keeping the feet always grounded on the terrain, would offer a richer picture to understand how 'living together *in diversity*' is organized, narrated, and lived in contemporary societies.

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¹ Communitarianism is an ‘umbrella-term’ to capture a variety of theoretical and normative positions, which include among others the works of Charles Taylor, Michael Sandel, Alasdair MacIntyre and Michael Walzer, who were at the forefront of the so-called ‘communitarian critique’ (see, among others Caney, 1992; Mulhall and Swift 1992; Delaney 1994; Kymlicka 2002).

² Liberal nationalism is also called liberal culturalism, liberal-democratic communitarianism or communitarian liberalism and it features, among its main proponents, Will Kymlicka, David Miller, Joseph Raz, Yael Tamir, Margaret Canovan, and Joseph Carens (Bader 1997; Kymlicka 2002). Multiculturalism is even a broader term. In this article, I am not so much concerned with what Miller (1995) calls ‘radical multiculturalism’, i.e. the sort of ‘old’ multiculturalism practiced until the 1990s, which privileged the preservation of minority identities at the expense of a common identity (Modood 2011). My focus is instead on the most recent multicultural literature which envisions the creation of inclusive national identities – what Vertovec (2010) calls ‘post-multiculturalism’.

³ The selection was based on a cross-tabulation of the results of a cluster analysis (using the significant predictors from a binary logistic model on European attachment (Eb 60.1, 2003) and Eurostat data (2001-03) about regional GDP per capita (in Purchasing Power Parity values) for each region in the EU-15. More specifically, the cluster analysis grouped all the 188 European regions into four clusters. According to their GDP, the 188 regions were classified into three groups: 63 regions with < 19,080 euro per capita; 62 regions with $\geq 19,080$ and $\leq 22,898$ euro per capita; and 62 regions with > 22,898 per capita. After running a cross-tabulation, the final regions were selected for their being representatives of the highest number of cases in each of the four clusters distributed across the three GDP categories.

⁴ Lombardia, in particular, is a region which since the 1950s has experienced a relevant inflow of migrants from Southern Italy – a point recalled by various interviewees who indeed made often a comparison between this internal migratory flow with the more recent, international one.

⁵ Data source: INSEE (France), National Statistics (United Kingdom), ISTAT (Italy), and Tilastokeskus (Finland). Figures relate to the year 2005 (when the main fieldwork for the present

research was carried out).

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