

Facade Diversity

The Individualization of Cultural Difference

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abstract: Diversity and multiculturalism are widely embraced principles, championed by many social movements and promoted through the programs and policies of states, businesses, schools and other organizations throughout the world. Purportedly celebrating and protecting group differences, these principles translate concretely into differences that operate as facades masking the underlying individualization of world society. Fundamental to this process is a dualistic globalization of the individual – both cultural and organizational – that impels the conscious construction of personal identities as both authentic and unique. Individuals therefore activate collective identity elements as sources of personal difference and distinctiveness. The nature of these collective identities is undergoing rapid change, however. The very forces impelling the championing of difference – rising individualism, egalitarianism, identity construction and uniqueness – diminish the degree of difference carried by collective identities, transforming corporate collectivities (once rooted firmly in geographic, ethnic, linguistic or ancestral ties) into categorical groups that provide identity not as a transcendent group property but as a volitional characteristic of categories of individuals. Corporate identities may not disappear, but as they are transformed into categorical identities they become facades behind which the depth of differences among the world’s cultures and subcultures is diminishing rapidly.

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Introduction

Every year, usually in the spring, colleges and universities throughout the US organize ‘international day’, a celebration of diversity in the center of campus; no self-respecting school would be without one. Countries and cultures of every kind are proudly represented through authentic foods, music, dance and information displays. Students from Thailand serve

plates of *gang gai* and *moo dang*. The Indian highlight is a dozen young women, decked out in gold-threaded saris, performing *Dholi Taro* dances. At the Brazilian booth, students flash spectacular photos of the Amazon and Rio de Janeiro while a samba singer stirs up the crowd. No American peculiarity, the international day has swept the globe. Telemark University College in Bo, Norway, precedes its event with an information meeting about studying abroad. Sias International University in Xinzheng City, China, has a Culture Week that includes a general International Day and separate days for China, East Asia, Africa, Europe and North America. Yew Chung International School in Quindao, China, for children through age 13, has students prepare costumes, flags, hats, badges and other items representing countries on five continents. Diversity can be no greater or more evident; multiculturalism is, to all appearances, alive and flourishing.

Schools are not the only ones. Cities, NGOs, ethnic groups, even IGOs get in on the act. Ethnic minorities in Zadar, Croatia, organized the first International Day of Cultural Diversity in 2006, celebrating Albanian, Bosnian, Hungarian, Italian, Serb, Slovenian and Macedonian cultures while local authorities and diplomats traveled from Zagreb to join in the festivities. International Culture Week in Pécs, Hungary, brings together young people from dozens of countries for lectures, workshops, concerts, sports events and a 'gastro-market'. The Association of Southeast Asian Countries (ASEAN) offers a biennial Culture Week, with rotating host countries; the 2004 gathering at Tuân Châu Island, Vietnam, 'helped the Vietnamese people to appreciate the cultural diversity of ASEAN countries' (Vietnam News Service, 2004). UNESCO has sponsored the International Day of the World's Indigenous People on 9 August each year since 1995, with activities ranging from speeches and panel discussions to art displays and indigenous peoples' dance performances. In all of these events, the message is clear: the diverse world is here; here is the diversity of the world!

At the transnational level, world society is replete with champions of diversity and difference. Gay and lesbian organizations rally in support of differences in sexual preference almost everywhere (Frank and McEaney, 1999). Racial and minority ethnic groups mobilize to protect their distinctive cultures and traditions, both nationally and globally (Olzak, 2006). International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) labor tirelessly to protect indigenous peoples and their habitats, and to preserve local cultures (Niezen, 2003). Governments set limits on film and television imports and support national academies to indigenize foreign (mostly English) words. Regions within states (Aceh in Indonesia, Catalunya in Spain, Gondwana in India, Skåne in Sweden) fly their own flags and promote their distinctive languages or dialects, some of them seeking autonomy or independence from their national states. The UN

sponsored the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (1995–2004) and the UN General Assembly (2007) has adopted a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that offers a range of protections for its subjects.

Correspondingly, ideologies promoting diversity and multiculturalism are widely embraced.¹ In the community, the school, the workplace, the political party and the sitcom on television, diversity is prized, and it is institutionalized in policy and practice throughout world society. Multiculturalism is official government policy in many countries, expressed in legislation (e.g. the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1985), celebratory periods (Sweden's 'Year of Multiculturalism' in 2006) and public school curricula. Businesses and associations routinely adopt recruitment and promotion policies designed not simply to prevent discrimination but to ensure that their workforces are diverse across numerous dimensions – ethnicity, gender, disability and more. Academic journals seek diverse editorial boards; companies seek diverse boards of directors; broadcasters seek diverse news anchor teams. Organizations of many types establish executive offices – a university vice-provost, a company vice-president, a professional association committee – charged with ensuring that diversity and difference are more than just hollow words. They are goals linked to mechanisms that shape everyday practice, imperfectly but doggedly pushing for ever greater inclusiveness.

Diversity is hardly without its critics, of course. Some argue that diversity threatens social integration and stability; incompatible values and world views are bound to generate conflict and discord (West, 2005). In Durkheim's terms, diversity fragments the *conscience collective* that maintains social solidarity. Others worry that diversity ideology legitimates unacceptable practices and customs; if all cultures are to be equally respected and accepted, no grounds remain for combating practices and customs that are inherently abhorrent (Schmidt, 1997). Diversity ideology is also taken to task for reducing individual equality of opportunity by making collective identity a basis for access to education and employment. These and other complaints have made diversity and multiculturalism highly controversial, though the critics are largely on the defensive in most places.

Our purpose here is not to wade into the muddy waters of diversity's virtues or defects. Rather, we call into question the depth of the differences that are championed by advocates of diversity and multiculturalism. Behind the amazing artifacts, dramatic dances, fabulous foods and stunning styles of International Day, there is less diversity than meets the eye. We suggest that much of the worldwide celebration and promotion of diversity is the construction of facades that obscure underlying similarity and homogeneity. We also suggest that the cultural processes driving

facade diversity ultimately further the homogenization of individuals, societies and cultures, at least as much as they preserve and protect difference.

Our argument can be summarized as follows. Diversity and multiculturalism, while seemingly oriented to the celebration and preservation of group differences, are facades that mask, and are generated by, the underlying individualization of world society. Powerful globalization processes – economic, political, educational and so on – are predicated on the individual as the fundamental unit of social organization and have strongly individuating effects. Highly legitimated and penetrative world-cultural elements, above all human rights ideologies, give pride of place to the self-directed, egalitarian, empowered individual as the most meaningful and valued social entity. This two-pronged globalization of the individual – organizational and cultural – entails two general obligations: individuals must consciously construct their identities to build (or discover) authentic selves, and the identities they construct must be unique. Individuals therefore activate available collective identity elements as sources of personal difference and distinctiveness, often setting great store in the value of those collective identities. But the forces impelling the championing of difference – rising individualism, egalitarianism, identity construction and uniqueness – diminish the degree of difference carried by collective identities. Historically, corporate collectivities (e.g. bands, tribes, chiefdoms) have been the chief repositories of cultural difference and identity, submerging the individual within distinct collective (sub)cultures. The rise of individualism, however, both transforms corporate collectivities into categorical groups and generates explosive growth in new categorical identities that define common characteristics, not for subordinate members of corporate entities, but for sets of individuals (e.g. women, persons of color, youth, persons with disabilities, immigrants). Corporate identities do not disappear, but as they are transformed into categorical identities they serve mainly as facades behind which the depth of differences among corporately organized cultures is diminishing rapidly.

In brief, individualism drives both the quest for personal difference and the decline of difference among corporate collectivities. To develop this argument, we begin with a review of globalization theory related to issues of homogenization and heterogeneity, noting a recent emphasis on the latter. Next, we critically analyze various ideologies of cultural diversity and multiculturalism, exploring the underlying world-cultural principles that legitimate their claims. We then contrast corporate collectivities and categorical groups to highlight the extent to which contemporary assertions of diversity and difference increasingly reflect categorical, rather than corporate, identities. This returns us to the central pillar of our argument – the globalization of individualism as the driving force behind facade diversity. We conclude with some thoughts about diversity facades in

general, beyond those involved in the individualization of collective identity and difference.

Homogenization and Diversity in Globalization Theory

The first wave of global theorizing, produced well before globalization had become a standard term, posited sweeping homogenization of societies and cultures. These early accounts focused mainly on the mass media. Radio, television, film and news services constituted a new form of capitalist control – cultural imperialism – that was reshaping the world in the image of the West, particularly of the US (Mattelart, 1979; Schiller, 1976). In the wake of decolonization, great powers could no longer rely on direct politico-military control; instead, they turned to ideological and psychological domination through communication technologies. With the rapid expansion of global telecommunication systems and the proliferation of television, American and European media companies flooded the airwaves of the less-developed world in a broad-based assault on local and national cultures. Filled with content and images embodying western culture and values, propelled by advertising campaigns promoting ideologies of consumption, instant gratification and self-absorption, this assault undermined local cultures and ran roughshod over indigenous ways of life throughout the world (Smith, 1980).

A similar view of rampant homogenization predominated in the wave of globalization theorizing proper in the 1990s, this time focused more on the world economy and transnational corporations in general. Ritzer (1993) called it 'McDonaldization', the spread of rationalized techniques of modern organizations that flatten out differences in tastes and preferences. Sklair (1995) emphasized the 'culture-ideology of consumerism' pushed by capitalist elites and their TNCs, turning everyone into status seekers obsessed with material goods. In Taylor's (1996) world-system analysis, the problem was not globalization so much as Americanization, the hegemonic US imposing domestic values and ideologies on the rest of the world (see also Védrine, 2001). By and large, globalization was virtually tantamount to homogenization in this period.

Countering the Homogenization Thesis

Challenges to the cultural imperialism and homogenization theses were not long in coming. Some scholars zeroed in on the media imperialism claim, noting great changes in the global media industry since the 1970s. Sinclair et al. (1996), for example, showed that new centers for media production and exporting – Mexico and Brazil, Hong Kong and Taiwan,

Egypt and India – have arisen in various ‘geolinguistic’ regions. These centers offer domestic programming that reflects local demand while adapting western advertising models to ‘exploit’ their own audiences. Other scholars (see Sreberny-Mohammadi [1991] for an overview) found that media production has been considerably ‘localized’ and western cultural products ‘indigenized’ (Turner, 1992). Meanwhile, critics took apart the cultural imperialism thesis on several grounds. Following the trail blazed by Liebes and Katz (1990), media scholars found that audiences viewed globally popular programs like *Dallas* in distinct ways, depending on their local cultural lenses. Following Griswold (1987), literary analysts found that readers applied different meaning systems to novels. Anthropologists revealed that audiences on the receiving end of western cultural products are not ‘blank slates’ passively submitting to outside influences; they are active and critical, their responses are complex, and their values are resistant to manipulation (Askew and Wilk, 2002). In a compelling analytical critique, Tomlinson (1991) pointed out that all cultures have always been mixes of many ‘external’ influences. Deciding what is being forcibly ‘imposed’ on any given culture is no easy matter; neither is it easy to identify the ‘authentic’ core of a culture that is imperiled by cultural imperialists. Hence, while the diffusion of western images and practices is widespread, they do not, the challengers insisted, produce automatic homogenization or the destruction of local cultures.

Robertson’s (1992) globalization theorizing problematized the homogenization thesis at a more general level. For Robertson, globalization is a process of ‘relativization’ in which people and societies recognize that the world is a single entity and therefore must make sense of their own cultures and identities in new and complex ways. They must grapple with questions of what it means to live in a globalized world and how that world should be ordered. How they address these large-scale questions depends on their local vantage points. The world may be a single place but, because the global is always referenced in relation to the local (i.e. it is ‘particularized’ or ‘glocalized’), world society is rife with contending world views. More inclusive and far-reaching globalization thus implies greater diversity and contention in world society, not less; and this diversity is not just locally asserted. The flipside of Robertson’s particularization of the global is the globalization of the particular, that is, local ideas and practices are universalized to become part of the global cultural repertoire. This process bumps up diversity everywhere as the world-cultural environment becomes denser and more complex.

Similarly, Appadurai (1990) describes a world of intense cultural flows that collide in various ways within societies. People, technology, money, media and ideas flow independently of one another at different rates across the globe. Globalizing forces thus create ‘disjunctures’ in how people

observe and make local sense of their surroundings, leading to countless 'imagined worlds' and particularized identities. For Hannerz (1991), globalization is above all the 'organization of diversity' as different societies with varying domestic arrangements adapt to different configurations of transnational flows and connections. Observing Nigerian life in the city of Kafanchan, Hannerz depicts a culture shaped by the interplay between indigenous elements (ethnic groups, educational systems, political arrangements) and external elements imported via various mechanisms (modern railways, markets, media outlets). While cultural products and ideologies flow mainly from the core to the periphery, Hannerz argues that nearby cultural exchange is more significant than long-distance influences. He espies not homogenization so much as 'creolization', or complex combinations of many cultural influences that vary greatly from place to place. For Hannerz and many other anthropologists, globalization may have increased the complexity of creolized or hybrid cultures but it is hardly making all local cultures identical.

Shifting the emphasis somewhat away from glocalization arguments, world polity scholars have focused on the isomorphism entailed by world-cultural models and scripts defining similar identities and goals for states, organizations and individuals, despite great variation in local circumstances (Meyer et al., 1997; Thomas et al., 1987). For example, virtually all states, whether rich or poor, Asian or African, Muslim or Christian, operate similarly structured educational systems built around similarly structured curricula (Meyer et al., 1992a, 1992b). The same goes for support for science (Drori et al., 2003), environmentalism (Frank et al., 2000), national human rights ministries (Koo and Ramirez, 2006) and much more. Worldwide models also shape the structure and purposes of organizations – corporations, voluntary associations, universities (Riddle, 1993) – in similar ways.

Homogenization is thus promoted by the enactment of world-cultural models and scripts, but it is tempered by several factors. Most important is the loose coupling that characterizes enactment: because world-cultural models are highly abstract, local versions vary considerably depending on local politics and practices. Similarly, because actualization of the models requires considerable resources – building a fully capable modern state is beyond the reach of many countries – enactment may be more rhetorical than operational. In addition, conflicting world-cultural principles open the door to variations in appropriate policies; a commitment to equality leads to an emphasis on social welfare systems while devotion to individual liberty leads to an emphasis on markets. The enactment process thus implies that, at any given time, the fit between idealized models and local practices is rather loose, though it tends to become tighter over the long term – i.e. homogenization increases – as global models become more authoritative and constitutive in local arenas.

In sum, more recent theorizing about homogenization and cultural diversity leans toward heterogeneity. Globalization processes may have homogenizing tendencies but local cultures are not clearly undermined by them. Individuals are not simply cultural dopes who internalize the images and attitudes carried by MTV videos or Bollywood spectacles. Yet the threat is real enough, in the eyes of a great many activists, INGOs and social analysts. Diversity and difference need champions and protectors, whether the concern be domestic multiculturalism or global cultural heterogeneity.

Diversity Ideology in World Culture

In our view, many of the assertions of diversity and distinctiveness ring rather hollow. We see much diversity mobilization as the maintenance of facades that obscure increasing uniformity in the goals, attitudes and modes of life of the individuals proclaiming the value of diversity and uniqueness. What is more, much of this mobilization is self-negating in that it strengthens the homogenization processes to which it so strenuously objects. This is so because diversity mobilization is largely generated by the sweeping individualization of world society, which diminishes the significance of collective difference and distinctiveness while making individual uniqueness ever more central to identity construction.

To develop these assertions, we begin with a close examination of the cultural logic of diversity and multiculturalism ideologies. Underlying the movements, policies, organizations and practices promoting diversity and multiculturalism are numerous world-cultural principles and legitimations that establish their value both on intrinsic moral grounds and for the purported benefits they entail. As moral values, diversity and multiculturalism are constructed as matters of justice and equality: all groups deserve equal empowerment; discriminatory policies and practices are unjust; arbitrary exclusion violates the rights of the excluded. On instrumental grounds, diversity and multiculturalism offer many purported advantages: they make life more interesting and colorful, they broaden people's horizons, they facilitate creativity and innovation, they maximize the range of skills and faculties available for societal development, and so on. They make science better: 'A diverse workplace can make for novel and innovative science brought about via the richness of different approaches and experiences, and add to the robustness of proposals and solutions' (Lawrence, 2005: 20). Obversely, science shows that diversity is beneficial, as in Page's (2007) mathematically based work arguing that, under fairly general conditions, 'diversity trumps ability'. Page concludes: 'organizations, firms, and universities that solve problems should seek out people with diverse experiences, training, and identities that translate into diverse perspectives and heuristics' (Page, 2007: 173). Diversity is desirable in all sorts of ways, beyond its inherent virtue.

Legitimations of diversity rooted in or linked to nature are common. Some take the form of biological analogies (Harmon, 2002): like natural ecosystems, societies flourish and are most robust when diversity is high; monocultural or low-diversity societies are impoverished and vulnerable to external shocks. Shiva (1993: 65) pushes the analogy to a mutual causal connection: 'The co-evolution of culture, life forms, and habitats has conserved the biological diversity of this planet. Cultural diversity and biological diversity go hand in hand.' Hence, natural and human diversity are mutually dependent. In both spheres, diversity brings richness, vitality and flexibility.

The ideologies of diversity and multiculturalism are inextricably intertwined with that of authenticity. Difference that is valuable is difference that is true, genuine and authentic. Cultural diversity has meaning only if cultures are true to themselves; individual diversity has no value if individuals are wearing masks. Hence, efforts to protect local cultures from the homogenizing globalization steamroller seek above all to preserve the authenticity of these cultures. Tourism is taken to task for undermining local cultures through its tawdry commercialization of traditional dance, song and ritual, reducing local cultures to inauthentic shadows of themselves (for a critical discussion, see Meethan, 2005). Travelers (as opposed to tourists) wander the world in search of peoples and places authentically different from home. At the individual level, authenticity has long been the holy grail of the self-seeker, from Shakespeare's Polonius ('This above all – to thine own self be true') to Krishnamurti's self-knowledge to Ricoeur's narrative identity. Authenticity has even become a business strategy, underpinning titles like *Authentic: How to Make a Living by Being Yourself* (Crofts, 2003) and *Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value* (George, 2004).

Another intertwined ideology has ancient philosophical roots: cultural or value relativism. Diversity and multiculturalism depend profoundly on relativism. Only if all cultures are equally valid and valuable, only if judging other cultures by the standards of one's own is misguided and ignorant, can diversity truly occupy the moral high ground. If some cultures are better than others, then the deficient cultures should shape up. If one culture is superior to all others, why should not all others assimilate to it? The cultural relativism pillar supporting diversity ideology is its most controversial element, for cultural absolutism – the resolute belief that core features of one's own culture are both absolutely true and absolutely superior to all others – is also a powerful ideology. Yet absolutism is most often seen as inherently narrow and parochial, labeled pejoratively as extremism, fundamentalism, ethnocentrism or nationalism. Associated with intolerance and tendencies toward violence, disdained for its rejection of the unity of humanity, absolutism is usually on the defensive.²

These well-institutionalized ideologies operate in tension with seemingly contradictory world-cultural principles. Chief among them is the principle of the equality of all individuals, encapsulated in a standardized model of the individual that posits the fundamental sameness of every human being. Everyone shares a basic biological constitution and related physiology, everyone develops physically and mentally through similar processes, everyone is vulnerable to the same physical ailments and psychological disorders. Even more, everyone has the same intrinsic worth and, hence, the same essential rights. Thus, we are not different, not in any way that matters; we have the same needs, desires, hopes, dreams and rights to fulfill them. Our differences are less than what they seem. Indeed, our differences show how similar we are because they indicate the varied ways that human cultures and societies can meet needs and pursue hopes that are, after all, the same from person to person, from place to place. As the Zapatistas (EZLN General Command, 1996) put it, capturing the irony perfectly, 'We are all the same because we are different.'

The seeking and finding of commonality, similarity, mutual recognition of the self in the other – the rejection, in other words, of the notion of fundamental or unbridgeable or irreconcilable differences based on race, religion, gender, ethnicity, sexual preference or any other 'invidious' distinction – stands front and center in the celebration of diversity and multiculturalism. By coming together, proclaiming our differences, and accepting each other in a wholehearted embrace that accords equal dignity and rights and worth to all, we demonstrate, in the end, our utter indifference to those differences.

Utter indifference to difference: in other words, we welcome each other as pure and simple individuals. We do not allow traits that divide and separate, often in bitter and violent ways, to interfere with our mutual acceptance. We treat each other not as instances of collective identities but as unique, complex, evolving beings attuned to one another through our ineluctable individuality. Your identity may contain entirely different elements from mine but at base we are one and the same. You may be white, European, Christian, male, Swiss, but I who am black, African, Muslim, female, Malian, see through the obscuring veils of those outer identities to the real you, the authentic person, the fellow human being – my brother, my friend, my lover. You are uniquely you, as I am uniquely I. We are individuals and we are humans, and all that we share as individual humans brings us together.

This powerful ideology of sameness through diversity has crucial, globalized Durkheimian and Simmelian effects. Global integration ties an ever growing proportion of the world's population into a common meaning system and orienting framework (the *conscience collective* of world culture) while global differentiation – technical, occupational, subcultural, commercial – fashions unique lifeworlds (webs of group affiliation) for each

individual embedded in the global frame. The ideology of uniqueness impels individuals to intensify this process as a positive and valued – indeed, obligatory – aspect of personhood: my life world must differ from those of all others! At the same time, as we discuss in the next section, individualism erodes corporate identities, transforming them gradually – but sometimes abruptly – into categorical identities. The pull of corporate groups weakens as the gravitational field centered on the individual gains force. Corporate collectivities lose their hold on their individual members; sacrifice of the self in service to or on behalf of the corporate collectivity fades from obligation to unwanted, and often rejected, imposition.

The hollowing out of the middle range of collective meaning and identity contrasts sharply with the thickening ontological status and significance of entities at the lower and upper bounds of social construction: the individual and humanity as a whole. The global *conscience collective* revolves primarily around these two entities, above all in the predominant ideological role assumed by human rights discourse in world society (Elliott, 2007; Lauren, 1998). Unlike historically related versions of ‘natural’ or ‘citizenship’ rights, ‘human’ rights are not bestowed by the gods or collective secular authorities acting as the ultimate source of value. Rather, they inhere in all individuals by virtue of their membership in the ‘human family’. Thus, our common humanity is the ultimate justificatory anchor for individualist ideology, just as it is for other global secular ideologies such as environmental preservation and world cultural heritage. Human rights are crucial for securing not only the inherent dignity of each individual person but also the well-being of humanity writ large: if one suffers, all suffer; if one is diminished, humanity is diminished. But this ideology does not make of humanity a corporate collectivity (of, for example, *Homo sapiens* or earthlings) subordinating its members to a uniform transpersonal identity. Instead, the humanity of world society is a collection of universally equal, sovereign, empowered and difference-seeking individuals. Durkheim understood that individualism’s triumph implies a reduction of the *conscience collective* to a single element – our shared humanity – but the individuals embedded in that collective identity are ever more compelled to establish their authentic uniqueness through conscious identity construction.

Corporate Collectivities, Categorical Groups and Cultural Difference

We asserted earlier that individualism undermines corporate collectivities, transforming them into categorical groups. Here we elaborate in an ideal-typical way on the difference between these constructs. In corporate collectivities, individuals are embedded within and subordinate to the group (Durkheim, 1984; Swanson, 1971). The collectivity is not the sum of

its members; it is culturally constructed as independent of, more highly valued and, in an ontological sense, more real than the people who comprise it. Members of a corporate collectivity have no meaningful social existence apart from the collectivity. They belong to the corporate entity in a strong sense: in effect, they are the property of the corporate collectivity, and the interests of the group override their individual interests. Correspondingly, corporate collectivities are strongly bounded and typically endogenous; outsiders can become members only in accordance with strict rules and, often, onerous initiation rites. Hence, members of corporate groups are not individuals in the ordinary sense; they are instances of the corporate identity and its associated culture. This subordination of the individual to the collectivity is captured well by a story Daniel Lerner often related about his interviews in 'traditional' villages in the Middle East (Lerner, 1958): when asked for an opinion on a matter, not infrequently the villager being interviewed would pause, make an apology and depart, returning only after having ascertained his opinion by asking the local chief for it. The chief 'embodied' the village (or clan) and was thus the repository of collective opinion, which ipso facto was individual opinion as well.

Categorical groups contrast sharply with corporate collectivities. Categorical groups have no independent significance or ontological substance. They have weak and permeable boundaries, with few rules regarding membership and minimal or no ritualized entry process. They are collections of individuals who share a particular trait but not a holistic identity or a thick cultural environment. Individual members have primacy, choosing when and how to activate the categorical identity and, perhaps, concealing it or simply ignoring it. Hence, membership in a categorical group is voluntary, or nearly so, and the cultural distinctiveness embedded in membership is thin and specific. Members belong only in the weak sense that they are 'properly classified' as fitting the category definition, but categorical groups typically do not bother to check that aspirants are in fact properly classified and they typically do not even have mechanisms for doing so.

The distinction between corporate collectivities and categorical groups resembles the now outmoded distinction between ascribed and achieved status, whose decline was hastened by investigations of ascribed status – most tellingly, of racial and ethnic identity – that demonstrated the elastic nature of even seemingly immutable corporate identities (Barth, 1969; Cornell, 2006). Still, the terms are useful: corporate identities and their associated cultures are 'written on' the person in (nearly) indelible ink by the impersonal scribes of birth circumstances, while categorical identities involve individual volition and a more distant relationship to the limited cultural implications of the identities. That the parallel is not exact is also

useful for explicating the distinction between the two kinds of collectivities. Gender is normally considered an ascribed status – if an infant's sex is female, so is her gender and she very likely will become a girl and a woman – but gender is organized not corporately but categorically. Though gender boundaries are strong and gender identity is activated ubiquitously, women are not merely 'instances' of womanhood, obligated to subordinate their personal interests to the welfare of women in general. They are individuals who can – indeed, are expected to – work out their own understandings of womanhood and activate those understandings in volitional ways. Similarly, men do not constitute a reified collectivity with an internal authority structure defining a 'general will' that overrides individual men's goals and ambitions. Correspondingly, the 'cultures' associated with genders are relatively thin, flexible and open, despite popular imagery about Martian men and Venutian women (see, for example, Gray, 1993).³

Corporate collectivities are usually kin-based – the extended family, the clan, the tribe, the nation – though shared lineage relations in larger collectivities are often fictional or legendary rather than documented. These collectivities can also be territorial, such as a village or region; they can be occupational or functional (Weber's status groups); they may have a religious base; or they may combine various characteristics (for example, the caste or ethno-religious group). Any given person may belong to two or a few corporate groups but not to dozens or scores, as is common with categorical groups.

Categorical groups are hardly new, of course. They can be traced back to ancient times and may even have prehistorical origins. What is new, however, in the rise of the modern state, exchange economy, technological systems, differentiated occupational structures, formal organizations, scientific research and other central institutions of modernity, is their stupendous proliferation in recent centuries. They constitute and organize extraordinary diversity at many levels, but this diversity is partial, limited and much more external to individuals than the thick cultures of corporate collectivities.

We come, then, to the crux of our argument: corporate collectivities have historically been not only the primary units of social organization and meaning but also the main loci of cultural distinctiveness. Bands, tribes, chiefdoms, nations (in the original sense) and so on vary greatly in terms of ritual, etiquette, ornamentation, language, social organization and political structure (Service, 1978). These variations reflect highly disparate cultures, world views and interpretive schemas that underpin great differences in collective (and therefore individual) identity and self-understanding. Furthermore, because individual members are submerged within these larger collectivities (based on kinship relations, for example), their corporate identities are based on non-individualized cultural ontologies, making

it difficult for any one person to embrace cognitively two or more identities. Tribal collectives, for example, may share similarities in terms of hunting and horticultural methods, division of labor or familial associations, but it would be very difficult for a Cheyenne of the North American plains to grasp the culture and identity of a Tungus of northern Siberia. Unlike more porous categorical identities based on gender, race or even nationality, one could not be both Cheyenne and Tungus because of the vast cultural and identity gulf separating these corporate collectivities.

In a world of expansive individualism, corporate collectivities are losing their grip, taking on more of the character of categorical groups. Compared to earlier times, they may retain much – or at least considerable – diversity and difference, but they matter less for their members' identities and life worlds. One indicator of their declining significance, we think, is the very fact that cultural, ethnic and religious identities have become major vehicles for the assertion of diversity and difference. That individuals activate them consciously, and often fervently, is a sign of their increasingly voluntary nature, that is, their transformation into categorical characteristics. By contrast, we suggest that the identity and culture of integral corporate collectivities are not likely to form the basis of social movements, policies or celebrations. They are not likely to be the object of deliberate or strategic evaluation. They are sufficient in themselves, constituting a defining ontological condition that need not be asserted or championed because it adheres 'in the nature of things'. Those who mobilize around difference and distinctiveness have already made crucial cultural shifts – toward organizing their lives in terms of categorical rather than corporate identities, toward voluntaristic, egalitarian individualism, toward empowered participation in modernity as uniqueness-seeking individuals.

Individualism in World Society

What stands behind our claim that the individual is so much on the rise, that the corporate identities that seem so clear and strong and essential to many ethnic and religious groups are transforming into categorical identities? While we could adduce a thousand everyday examples – rejection of arranged marriages in Lahore and Nubia, the substitution of institutional for filial elder care in Japan, high rates of exogenous marriage of second-generation Asians in the West, the shifting of the grounds for shame in Korea from family disgrace to personal incompetence (Lee, 1999), and much more – such evidence is only descriptive and inherently anecdotal. We think the most compelling evidence is more abstract, embedded in central institutions of world society. The exchange economy, school systems, bureaucratic states, formal organizations, rationalized

legal systems and the like, all of which have expanded tremendously in recent decades, build upon and propagate the individual as the fundamental unit of action and value (Boli, 2005).

Probably the most important individualizing institution is formal schooling. School enrollments at all levels have expanded greatly in almost all countries (Meyer et al., 1992b). The great majority of the world's children spend some time in school and a large majority completes primary education; most also complete at least some secondary schooling. Schooling individualizes by assigning individual tasks, demanding individual recitation, evaluating students individually and so on. Thus, the dominant mode of childhood socialization works directly counter to corporate collectivities (with the partial exception of the nation), and intentionally so: children are to be treated equally, without regard to their collective identities. Much the same logic applies to the exchange economy, whose individualized transactions, wage and investment systems, property rights and so on promote individual interest-maximization, individual calculation and individual self-promotion (see Boli, 1995). The state fosters individualism in most of its activities, with individualized taxation, identity cards, pension systems, subsidies, criminal and civil justice systems and on and on. So too do most formal organizations, treating employees and clients first as individuals, only secondarily (and often illegally) as instances of collectivities or categories, as well as organized sports (especially concerned to develop individual self-discipline and self-improvement) and a great many individualizing forms of personal leisure and recreation activities. In short, virtually all globalizing institutions carry the individual on their shoulders, so much so that only the individual is seen as 'real' in most places – and by most social scientists.

The growing centrality of the individual in everyday life corresponds with a profusion of individual roles and identities linked to categorical groups rather than corporate collectivities (see Frank and Meyer, 2002). Similarly, the ongoing rationalization of the self both compels and facilitates ever more modes of individual expression signifying the healthy and full development of the person (Meyer, 1986). Ultimately, what the modern individual seeks is to make of the self a unique categorical group – with only one member – based on a unique set of categorical characteristics and self-enhancements. But none of those characteristics should be fixed or immutable; modern selfhood demands ongoing development that is flexible and self-directed, not subordinated to collective prescriptions and constraints. Thus, individuals must retain some distance from the many elements of their identity, and they put on and take off their categorically-based identity elements more or less at will.

Conclusion

We are skeptical about the students who celebrate their own and each other's cultures and folkways on International Day. They are not quite so diverse as they assume, for they are – or seek to be – unique, self-directed, empowered individuals freed from the bonds of corporate collectivities and the deep cultural differences they embody. Their commitment to collective identities – religious, ethnic, national, linguistic – is voluntaristic and creative, not automatic and obdurate. Like many other diversity advocates, sincere and devoted though they may be, they engage more in what Hobsbawm called the 'reinvention of tradition' (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) than in the protection and preservation of distinct cultures. They make of their background cultures a tableau of experiences and performances stripped of the cultural contexts that give them meaning.

When taken to its most extreme form, facade diversity is easily recognizable for the false fronts it constructs. Disney's Epcot Center in Florida is a singularly good example: 'celebrate the fascinating cultures and numerous wonders of the world around you through dazzling shows, interactive experiences and amazing attractions', the website proclaims (Walt Disney Company, 2007), luring visitors to the stylized pavilions of Canada, China, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, Norway, the US and the UK (somehow lacking a South American country, despite its inclusiveness). Another version is the nearby Magic Kingdom's 'It's a Small World', a boat ride 'around the world' in which child puppets in 'traditional' costumes, representing more than a hundred countries, sing the famously catchy tune about the unity of humanity. These two 'attractions' distill the matter to its essence: as equal members of the human category, our differences make us one and the same because they are superficial and irrelevant.

The same kind of distillation is evident in the museumization of cultural difference – the presentation of carefully selected and stylized versions of 'local' or 'indigenous' cultures. As MacCanell (1989: 8) put it, 'Increasingly the best indication of the final victory of modernity over other socio-cultural arrangements is not the disappearance of the non-modern world, but its artificial preservation and reconstruction in modern society'. This familiar and often criticized practice extends even to the global level. UNESCO's World Heritage list marks more than 800 sites in roughly 139 countries as especially valuable natural or cultural places of 'outstanding universal value'. In a rather ironic turn of events, places that were once unique symbols of cultural and civilizational development (e.g. Angkor Wat, Vatican City, the Taj Mahal) are now recognized, through a rigorous and thoroughly standardized process of scientific management, as part of the universal heritage of humanity as a whole. States that sign the World

Heritage Convention (1972), along with local residents and non-governmental experts, vow to preserve and protect these sites as a kind of communal property. Efforts have even been made to balance the World Heritage list geographically so that certain regions of the world (particularly the West) are not overrepresented in terms of the number of sites inscribed.

While we have concentrated here on cultural diversity in relation to corporate collectivities and categorical groups, facade diversity extends far beyond this familiar sphere. A striking example is the international airport terminal. Airports compete fiercely to attract world-famous architects offering spectacularly unique terminal designs. For the average traveler, though, the facade is of little consequence. The passenger experience is so highly standardized that travelers transiting from one flight to another can even forget where they are. No accident, this: airports meet the technical and functional requirements for passenger processing, security systems, baggage handling, and so on (Edwards, 2005), in largely uniform ways, not least because numerous international organizations require or advise them to do so. The diversity of terminals lies mainly in their facades, not in their operations or the experiences they provide.

Facade diversity is common not only in the architecture of the built environment but also, of course, in commercialized consumption. Success in the global marketplace depends heavily on product uniqueness; the quest for profit maximization impels ever more fine-grained niche differentiation. Thus, automobiles vary greatly in size, style, accessories and add-ons, as manufacturers hope to capture particular market segments and appeal to specific consumer preferences. 'Underneath the hood', though, automobiles meet common functional requirements in highly standardized ways, and the operational demands they place on drivers are so uniform that any reasonably competent motorist can get up to speed in almost any make of passenger vehicle within minutes. Thus, the auto travel experience, too, varies far less than auto facades.

We could multiply these examples almost limitlessly, following the long line of critical theory perhaps best exemplified, for our purposes here, by Baudrillard (1995). Simulacra and simulation have entered forcefully into world society, constituting new forms of reality in which the unique facade is the point, obscuring (if not obliterating) the referent behind the signifier. The presentation of self has become an inordinately elaborate matter of facade construction organized by a host of industries and professions, from fashion designers to color consultants to personal coaches. Cities, countries and universities are now 'branded' with as much care and concern as large corporations. Image consultants and public relations firms are crucial for political success. In these and many other domains, a remarkable dialectical chain has emerged: as individualism expands and corporate collectivities decline, diversity and distinctiveness are ever

more strongly valued and ever more surely reduced to facades, making the quest for authentic difference (of self, identity and culture) ever more intense but also more elusive.

Notes

1. To be sure, opposition to multiculturalism and diversity is widespread as well. In Europe, substantial single-issue parties focused on the 'immigrant problem' have arisen in France, Denmark, the Netherlands and elsewhere, and advocates of 'integration' (assimilation, i.e. elimination of difference) have a considerable presence in many countries. For the past several decades, however, they have been very much on the defensive.
2. UNESCO's (2002) Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, adopted in 2001, neatly encapsulates these legitimations, specifying a variety of benefits of human diversity and multiculturalism with regard to creativity, development and justice worldwide.
3. The reference is to the English title of Gray's book; the planetary allusions were not carried over in the titles of some of the translated versions.

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