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Abstract

The semantics of recognition and the question of tolerance have become frequently visited topics in contemporary political philosophy. This article analyzes, from Luhmann's social systems theory, the implications that the spreading of such semantics and the implementation (or not) of regimes of tolerance suppose to the social order. In this task, identity is conceived as an operation oriented towards differentiation that is linked to the recursivity of social communication (or culture). The concluding remarks suggest that the adoption of inter-system coordination oriented to tolerance is key for the survival of democracy in modern society, but under some circumstances, as the weakening of belonging bonds within the state civic community, the accentuation of identity differentiation can lead to conflict and to social fragmentation.

Keywords: social systems theory, identity, culture, tolerance, recognition.

Introduction

This article analyzes, through the lens of social systems theory, the implications of the spread of the semantics of recognition and the (non)establishment of regimes of tolerance for social cohesion in highly complex societies.

Since the 17th century, thanks to Enlightenment essayists such as Locke (1983 [1689]) and Voltaire (2000[1763]), tolerance emerges as a topic of major importance in political philosophy. Among various intellectuals of that era, a concern arose regarding the need to build sociopolitical regimes in which minority groups would not be excluded from public life or deprived of their civil rights.

Modern society is conceived, from a systems theory perspective, as a communicational system characterized by a high degree of functional differentiation, necessary to process the high levels of complexity inherent in this social form (Luhmann, 1982). If it is taken into account that identity corresponds to a selection made by the observer regarding certain contents of communication (Luhmann, 1982), it becomes clear that one of the consequences of this type of differentiation is the exponential increase in

possibilities for identity selection. This is because, as communicational memories proliferate –usually referred to as cultures in the social sciences (see Luhmann, 2022)– they can serve as the foundation for a given identity, unlike what occurs in less differentiated societies. In this sense, tolerance of different identities constitutes an essentially modern problem.

Globally, numerous movements advocating for various ethnic and racial identities flourished between the 1960s and 1980s (Fajardo, 2011; Ferrão, 2010; Fukuyama, 2018; Kymlicka, 1995; Meer & Modood, 2012). As a result, the protection of difference has taken on growing importance, and supranational institutions have begun to adopt the semantics of recognition. The pressure exerted by these institutions and social movements on nation-states has progressively led to a reorientation of policies toward granting greater rights to minoritized identities.

Throughout the 21st century, the radicalization of globalization, coupled with factors such as the free flow of capital, migration, and a more favorable context for minorized groups to claim their identity, has deepened the integration of global society. And, consequently, multiple identity-based semantics have proliferated.

In recent years, nonetheless, several right-wing populist movements have gained momentum –and in some cases come to power– across Europe and the Americas. One of the hallmarks of this populist wave is the promotion of identity-based rhetoric that, by emphasizing national belonging, aims to suppress any alternative identity deemed contrary to national values (Fukuyama, 2018). These discourses are supported primarily by members of the working class, with lower levels of education, who are reacting to the shift away from political agendas aimed at reducing economic inequalities in favor of those focused on defending minority rights (Gidron & Hall, 2017; Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

As a result, the issue of homogeneity and identity differences has taken center stage in public debate and politics. In turn, this revives the age-old question of social cohesion in the context of high levels of identity fragmentation –that is, the question of unity and difference within social systems. Analyzing the problem from the perspective of social systems theory allows for a better understanding of the tensions between individual and society, identity and cohesion, culture and society, or unity and differentiation that underlie the problem of tolerance and the semantics of recognition.

The document is divided into five sections. The first one problematizes the way in that the question of tolerance arises in modern society as a consequence of its structural and functional characteristics. Subsequently, the assumptions underlying the semantics of recognition, emerged as a response to the tensions associated with a context of growing identity differentiation, are analyzed. The third section delves into the realm of identity conflicts and armed mobilization motivated by ethnic reasons. The fourth section focuses on the study of the consequences that the proliferation of the identity issue has for social order, and the way in which society, as a system, can process it while avoiding disintegration. Finally, the conclusions of the analysis are presented.

Modernity as differentiation and the emergence of the problem of tolerance

Two defining features of modern society are, on the one hand, the high degree of specialization of its subsystems and structures and, on the other, the pronounced heterogeneity of its members in terms of their ethnic origin and identity, religious affiliation, and linguistic proficiency, among other aspects. These processes of systemic functional differentiation and diversification of individual identity affiliations create tension with the consolidation of a global society, jeopardizing its stability.

According to Luhmann (2012, 2013a), the complexity of social systems stems from the multiplication of their structures within the context of their interaction with the environment, with individuals being part of that environment. Consequently, there is no doubt that the simultaneous occurrence of functional differentiation and the fragmentation of individuals' identities poses challenges to social order. In this regard, it is important to bear in mind that the question of tolerance relates to the feasibility of reconciling, on the one side, growing identity and cultural diversity within national populations and, on the other, the structures of a globally integrated society characterized by its functional differentiation and high complexity.

To better understand the fundamental nature of the problem, it is necessary to consider that modern society differs radically from premodern societies in terms of its primary scheme of differentiation. These schemes determine the structure of society and its internal dynamics (Luhmann, 1982). Clan and tribal societies, which constitute the least complex societal models, are differentiated by segmentation, which divides society into

equal subsystems. This form of social organization results in the homogeneity of all its members, who maintain kinship ties with one another. At this stage of societal development, inequality does not have a systemic function (Luhmann, 1982).

For their part, more complex premodern societies were characterized by a system of differentiation through stratification, under which society is divided into unequal systems (Luhmann, 1982). The unequal quotas of access to power and wealth are inherent to this type of social order; therefore, groups at the bottom of the social pyramid face radical inequality in terms of their chances of integration into the communication and, consequently, have no opportunities to claim their own identity. In reality, the issue of the identity of the lower castes is not even regarded as a problem for the social order.

The problem with stratified differentiation is that it limits the complexity of a society. Modern society overcomes this obstacle by deploying a new form of organizing communication: functional differentiation, which organizes communication into specialized subsystems (politics, economics, law, science, art, etc.), but without any one of them gaining predominance. Under this new systemic structure, organization by castes or strata is overcome, allowing for progress toward an order in which social mobility becomes a reality (Luhmann, 1982).

Given that, under a scheme of functional differentiation, there is greater equity among individuals in terms of access to communication, they can –to a greater or lesser extent– claim the legitimacy of an identity-based selection made from specific communicational memories (culture). And, hence, it becomes practically impossible to eliminate identity and cultural diversity through suppression or marginalization, as was commonly done in segmented or stratified premodern societies. Consequently, tolerance, i.e. the recognition of the equality of group identities, emerges as a question only with the transition to modernity.

Now that the origin of the problem of tolerance and its distinctly modern nature has been clarified, it is necessary to delve into the history of thought on the subject and identify the assumptions underlying its semantics. The following section is devoted to this task.

The problem of tolerance: identity, culture, and the semantics of recognition

Ethnic identities are mechanisms of social organization, eminently strategic in nature (Barth, 1969), constituted through discourses or narratives that draw on resources such as history, culture, and language to define the boundaries between the insider and the outsider (Hall, 2000). It follows from this that every ethnic identity is linked, in one way or another, to culture, insofar as the operation of identity distinction is always grounded in the observation of a certain communicative reservoir.

From a systemic perspective, culture does not exist as a self-contained entity; rather, it is a result of the operation of social systems. Concretely, culture constitutes the memory of social systems; that is, it is recursivity of social communication (Luhmann, 2022). For its part, identity consists of a selection made by the observer in the context of communication (Luhmann, 2013b). Thus, considering the link between ethnic identity and culture, it is possible to argue that the former emerges as a distinction drawn from the observation of the recursivity of social communication.

The problem of tolerance, then, is how to reconcile the social order –as a communicational framework– with the diversity of choices that the observer makes regarding the communicational reservoir of social systems. If there is no minimal agreement regarding the communicational forms that can or should take place –what liberalism has termed an *overlapping consensus* (Rawls, 1996)– then it is impossible to sustain the autopoietic reproduction of society, due to communicational fragmentation, which would lead to social disintegration.

The concern for the respect of identity differences first appeared in political philosophy in the 17th century, championed by Enlightenment essayists. Central to the reflections on tolerance during this period was the religious factor, given the intense persecution of minority beliefs that had ensued after the Reformation (Grell & Porter, 2000).

In one of these pioneering essays on the coexistence of different groups within the same political community, Locke (1983[1689]) asserts that the salvation of souls and the practice of spirituality are matters that concern the Church alone and that, therefore, the State must refrain from defining acceptable religious practices. Eighty years later, in a France ravaged by religious intolerance, Voltaire would address the issue along similar

lines. The philosopher argues that to build a truly advanced society, it was necessary to put an end to religious persecution and the excesses it had unleashed; to this effect, it was imperative to establish freedom of religion and guarantee certain civil rights to religious minorities (Voltaire, 2000[1763]).

During the Enlightenment, there was a profusion of intellectual works calling for the cessation of injustices against minorities. Nevertheless, the consolidation of religious freedom and tolerance was due, to a large extent, to the pragmatic need to end religiously motivated civil wars and to the interest in ensuring the continuity of industrial, commercial, and scientific developments that such conflicts hindered (Höffe, 2015).

Despite the Enlightenment philosophers' vehement defense of tolerance as a crucial factor in the configuration of more stable and prosperous societies, the nineteenth century would witness the consolidation of nation-states that grounded their existence in homogenizing semantics and practices. Throughout this period, policies of nation-building were promoted, based, among other measures, on the imposition of a single written language and a national cultural imaginary through public education systems (Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990; Kymlicka, 2001).

In the aftermath of the crimes against humanity committed during World War II, concern for the rights of minorities has once again gained momentum. A key first step in this direction was, on the one hand, the London Charter or Charter of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, which typifies persecution on racial or religious grounds as a crime against humanity (United Nations, 1945), and, on the other hand, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which establishes inalienable rights inherent to the human condition, explicitly stating in its second article that these rights may not be restricted on the basis of a person's race, color, language, or religion (United Nations, 1948).

In this regard, it should be noted that, as Luhmann (2004) points out, law, as a social system, serves to stabilize certain expectations regarding inter-system dynamics (structural couplings) or those inherent to systems of interaction (face-to-face relationships). In this sense, international law constitutes a body of norms—that is, a program of the legal system—which, by consolidating political consensus, provides certain guarantees to minority identity groups against discrimination by the state.

Later, during the 1960s and 1970s, the concept of multiculturalism emerged in countries such as Australia and Canada as a political perspective for harmonizing the interests of the state with those of Indigenous peoples; in the case of Canada, this was further expanded to include the Quebec independence movement (Kymlicka, 1995; Meer & Modood, 2012). In later years, other European countries would adopt this paradigm, but with a focus not on minorities with territorial or self-governance claims, but rather on the inclusion of post- and neo-colonial migrant groups (Meer & Modood, 2012).

In parallel, in Latin America, a shared identity is taking shape among the region's indigenous peoples around the notion of *indigenous* (Ferrão, 2010). Influenced by this strengthening of indigenous political movements, social scientists in the region turned to the task of developing new approaches to the issue. Within this framework, the concept of interculturality emerges, constituting a new perspective that emphasizes the need for interrelation among different cultures (Ferrão, 2010; Fajardo, 2011). The new model of interethnic relations represented by interculturality has become a central component of the indigenous movements' semantics (Aman, 2022; Ferrão, 2010; Fajardo, 2011).

As a consequence of the outbreak of movements advocating for the rights of ethnic and national minorities around the world and the need for states to resolve such conflicts, various supranational organizations reconsidered their approach to the issue. Each of these organizations formulates its own classification of ethnic minorities and proposes different ways to regulate interethnic relations (Kymlicka, 2008).

Today, the normative frameworks or guidelines proposed by international actors have a growing importance in the development of national policies in this area, as each of them promotes certain models of integration while discouraging others (Kymlicka, 2008). In this sense, globalization has fostered the recognition of minority rights, as it has dismantled the monopolistic power once held by the nation-state, while simultaneously undermining its homogenizing agenda (Wright, 2016). That said, it must be acknowledged that, in practice, the only institution truly endowed with sufficient power to regulate identity policies within a given territory is the nation-state (Romaine, 2002).

Notwithstanding, the transformations in the global political landscape resulting from the wave of indigenous and ethnic minority movements in the second half of the 20th century, as well as the actions of major supranational actors, have also had an impact on

philosophy and political theory. Some of the most important political theorists in the field, despite belonging to very different traditions or schools of thought, converge –to a certain degree– on the importance of the semantics of recognition as a key structure in the normative view of society. Thus, for example, from a postcolonial perspective, Bhabha (1994) thematizes modernity as a historical-political project that denies the capacity for enunciation to subjects who ascribe to subaltern identities, in response to which he proposes articulating spaces for the agency of those belonging to these collectives. Meanwhile, Pettit (1997) argues that the republican ideal of freedom as non-domination will remain unattainable as long as the relevant groups with which individuals in a political community identify (ethnicity, nation, class, race, etc.) are subject to systematic discrimination.

In a similar vein, Kymlicka (1995), drawing on egalitarian liberalism, argues that it is necessary to protect the culture of ethnic and national minority groups, as it is within that context that individuals' life projects take shape. Meanwhile, from the perspective of communitarianism, Walzer (1997) notes that, in addressing cultural diversity within a society, there must be concern for both the individual and the group with which the individual identifies, though always within the framework of higher values that determine acceptable practices –a balance in which the state plays a central role.

For their part, social democratic intellectuals such as Meyer & Hinschman (2007) point out that, in the contemporary political context, it is necessary to broaden the concept of social rights to encompass those inequalities in the exercise of citizenship that may be linked to cultural cleavages (ethnic, religious, linguistic, etc.).

However, despite this presence across various schools of political thought, the currents favoring the semantics of recognition have not gone unchallenged. Indeed, egalitarian liberals, such as Barry (2001), warn that the culturalization of inequality lead –by pointing to identity and cultural differences as its primary cause– to the neglect of redistributive policies aimed at alleviating poverty and disparities in access to education. While Norberg (2003), a classical liberal, notes that recognition policies often attempt to keep cultures sterile, which ultimately transforms them into folklore or a sort of museum relic, compromising the dynamic and adaptive nature of culture. He advocates, instead, for

not restricting the openness of cultures, since interaction between different groups and globalization generate greater cultural exchange and richness.

From a Marxist perspective, Žižek (1997, 2007) argues that the multicultural policies of Western liberal democracies are covertly racist. This is because they constitute a paradigm that, from the supposed superiority of a neutrality self-perceived as universality, recognizes an aseptic *other* –devoid of the customs and traditions that are antagonistic to Western culture– with the aim of bolstering the nation-state's current weakened position and safeguarding a social order aligned with the universality of capital (Žižek, 1997, 2007).

Likewise, Sekyi-Otu (2019) argues for the need to frame the debate on the recognition of minorities within a revalued perspective of the left's universalist ideal. Such an approach would help avoid appeals to alternative frameworks that could lead to radical particularism. This last point is explored in greater depth in the following section.

Radicalization and armed ethnic conflict

There is a substantial body of research on how ethno-national tensions escalate into acts of war, insurgency, or terrorism. Yet, despite its crucial importance for understanding the issue, this topic is rarely addressed in studies that examine how identity-based differences can be processed by modern society.

Modernity has led to a dramatic increase in ethnically motivated violence, as it has facilitated the strengthening and proliferation of ethnic consciousness (Lange, 2017). Indeed, since the 1990s, ethno-national divisions have been the primary source of armed conflict worldwide (Lee & Lin, 2021). This is largely because the reinforcement of the aforementioned ethnic consciousness, under certain contextual and ideological conditions, can deepen emotional prejudices toward other groups and intensify the willingness to fulfill certain ethnic obligations –that is, to make sacrifices perceived as a path to improving the condition of one's own ethnic community (Lange, 2017).

According to Lange's (2017) categorization, emotional prejudice occurs when animosity is directed toward an entire ethnic group, which can manifest as anger, hatred, contempt, or fear. The central role played by the affective or emotional dimension in ethnic conflict is also supported by other approaches to the subject.

Several studies have highlighted the key role of negative emotions toward the other in ethnic mobilization in the context of the Rwandan genocide (McDoom, 2012) or of feelings such as hatred and rage in the ethno-religious conflict in Rakhine, Myanmar (Laoutides, 2021). Along these same lines, Klusemann (2012) illustrates, based on a study of the massacres in Srebrenica and Rwanda, that the patterns of ethnic violence in certain cases of mass killings are shaped by local emotional dynamics.

As mentioned earlier, identity is an operation of distinction that relies on certain symbolic or cultural elements. Consequently, given the centrality of the affective dimension in ethnic affiliation, ethno-national identification can be understood as the adherence to a series of malleable discursive constructs that depend on performative processes that produce, politicize, and homogenize a specific ethnic group (Maksic, 2017). In this sense, nationalist mobilization requires

> to create emotional reactions that could rearrange the self/other boundaries in dual ways. On the one hand, it penetrates the self/other boundary between group members, while, on the other, it draws sharp boundaries between the collective self and the out-group (Maksic, 2017, p. 25).

In this way, radical ethno-national semantics seek to lead the observer to perceive their own ethnic group as a closed entity that stands in opposition to –and is antagonistic toward– certain external group(s). To this end, this type of semantics brings together, within an ideological framework, various communicative memories (collective history, representations of the desired social, political, and economic organization, or specific symbolic elements linked to the group's own tradition) molded to a homogeneous conception of ethnic collectives, which presents the medium- and long-term objectives of each of these groups as irreconcilable with one another.

Those semantics associated with radical ethnic ideologies are displayed in such a way that they appeal not to rational logic, but to the emotional and visceral responses of individuals who identify with a particular ethnic category. In this sense, they exploit the capacity, as Nussio (2017) points out, that ideologies possess to generate affective shocks, cultivate emotions, and mold tendencies of action, with the purpose of encouraging armed mobilization.

This type of semantics, oriented towards fostering processes of ethnic-national radicalization and mobilization, tends to achieve broader acceptance or greater communicative success in contexts where one of the groups coexisting in the territory suffers from discrimination, a lack of opportunities, social marginalization, or profound economic inequality. In this regard, studies on the radicalization and deradicalization of Islamists in Europe have concluded that among the main risk factors for embracing this kind of ideology are discrimination, marginalization, and social, political, and/or economic exclusion (Kaya, 2021; Ohls et al., 2024; Reiter, et al., 2021).

Research findings from Asian and African contexts point in the same direction. In post-war Sri Lanka, for example, many young people have been compelled to join radicalized groups as a result of a lack of opportunities, a fragmented ethnic and social identity, and political and economic marginalization (Ramasamy, 2023). Studies focusing on former recruits of Al Qaeda and Boko Haram in African countries identify similar causes: historical marginalization, a highly unequal distribution of land ownership, weakened family structures, and social and economic discrimination and inequality (Mkutu & Opondo, 2021; Chiemezie, 2020).

Along the same lines, the experimental study by Renström et al. (2020) demonstrates that people who are particularly sensitive to rejection are prone to embracing radical ideologies in contexts of social exclusion. Likewise, Mousseau's (2020) research on conflicts in 140 countries over the course of a decade reveals that ethnic discrimination greatly increases the risk of local identity-based wars, while economic globalization and the rule of law are two key factors in preventing such conflicts.

Such contexts of profound exclusion, inequality, and weakened institutions provide fertile ground for some members of the group suffering these conditions to develop negative feelings, animosity, or ethnic prejudice toward others. Consequently, these individuals may become more receptive to radicalized narratives grounded in sacred values (Pretus et al., 2018), that is, those that, unlike common values, are linked to deontic reasoning and closely associated with feelings, which makes them particularly immune to material compensation (Ginges et al., 2011). It is this type of value that can become the core of ethnic obligations and, therefore, mobilize individuals to make sacrifices or even give their lives in their defense.

Among these values, that cannot be traded for any political, economic, or symbolic compensation, self-governance, independence, and territory are recurring ones. In the sphere of ethnic conflicts, territory is often the central sacred value from which tensions arise. This is largely because territory is frequently an attribute of ethnic identity, inseparable from a shared past and the continuity of future existence as a group (Toft, 2003).

In contexts where territory constitutes the sacred value around which the conflict is structured, the likelihood of success for radical semantics and, hence, for armed mobilization, is greater when two conditions are met: (1) the ethnic minority group demands sovereignty over a certain territory and (2) the state conceives this territory as an indivisible unit (Toft, 2003).

In most cases, the ethnic tensions that trigger an armed conflict develop decades –or even centuries– before the conflict itself. Nevertheless, in certain circumstances, there may not be a climate of particular animosity between different groups in the run-up to an ethnic conflict, but such an atmosphere can be manufactured through strategies such as media saturation based on specific semantics promoted by a political elite.

According to Perunovic (2016), the analysis of surveys conducted prior to the breakup of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s reveals that, in general, there was a low level of ethnic animosity within Yugoslav society, which highlights a significant gap between what the country's citizens actually felt and needed and what nationalist intellectuals claimed the public wanted and needed.

Social order in a context of growing identity differentiation

It is not easy to answer the core question of tolerance. It is not possible to propose a universal formula for achieving a social order –understood as a communicational framework associated with a certain mode of inter-system coordination– in which conflicts do not arise due to the proliferation of identity selections made by individuals as they observe the communicational memory of social systems, or, if such conflicts do arise, that they can be contained and resolved peacefully.

Given the factual reality of their multicultural nature, highly complex Western societies must, in order to maintain their stability, find institutional arrangements that

successfully integrate the recognition of minority cultures with a shared sense of belonging. As early as the mid-1990s, Raz (1994: 186) lucidly outlined this key aspect of the problem of tolerance:

> multiculturalism, while endorsing the perpetuation of several cultural groups in a single political society, also requires the existence of a common culture in which the different coexisting cultures are embedded. This is a direct result of the fact that it speaks for a society in which different cultural groups coexist in relative harmony, sharing in the same political regime.

In this sense, collective adhesion to the semantics of recognition would require identification with a particular culture –or communicative memory– in which such semantics become meaningful. In other words, the stability of a regime of recognition depends on different ethnic groups subscribing to a specific normative future that represents, to some extent, the general interest of the collective of such ethnic communities.

Habermas (1998) argues that, among the various forms of organization a political community can adopt, the democratic rule of law offers notable advantages for achieving inclusion that is sensitive to differences, as it allows for mechanisms such as federal administrative division, decentralization of state powers, and collective rights, among other mechanisms for protecting minorities. This argument is supported by the findings of Mosseau (2022), which reveal the importance of the rule of law –alongside global economic exchange– in the prevention of armed ethnic conflicts.

Nevertheless, as Scanlon (2003) points out, it is difficult for the citizenry as a whole to assume and maintain an attitude of tolerance. The normative specification of certain citizens' rights in formal and informal political participation may be helpful, "[b]ut any such system of rights will be conventional and indeterminate and is bound to be under frequent attack" (Scanlon, 2003, p. 201).

In any case, nationalist movements have been regaining strength since the beginning of the century, and it is necessary to find a way to channel these identity passions within a framework of peaceful coexistence. In this regard, institutionalizing tolerance for minority identities within a democratic system seems to be the most viable option. The accommodation of ethnic plurality within a multicultural institutional arrangement can be criticized as impractical or utopian. But conceptions that promote cultural homogeneity

within a national society, or those that pretend that identity differences do not exist and seek to transcend them solely by promoting membership in a non-cultural civic community, are even more unviable and utopian in the current global context (Gans, 2003).

Social orders derived from unitary or homogeneous conceptions of society lack the political mechanisms to accommodate minority identity claims; they can only suppress them through the use of force (examples of this include the situations of the Rohingya in Myanmar, the Palestinians in Israel, and the Uyghurs in China).

For their part, multicultural regimes face the paradox of reinforcing the very identity divisions they aim to reconcile. In other words, the semantics of recognition contain contradictory messages or a double bind, as described by Aman (2015: 162):

> at the same time as the act of crossing cultural borders is valorised and encouraged in the name of solidarity and dialog, borders are instituted in the process of relating to a perceived Other in opposition to a same. Thus, in attempting to bridge cultural differences, interculturality at the same time, in contradictory fashion, risks sustaining the unity of national identities.

This construction of an in-group as a cohesive entity composed of members who are similar to one another, and the representation of the other as an inherently alien and foreign being, can lead to essentialist conceptions of identity and to the fragmentation of society due to the primacy of identity-based loyalties over support for the common multicultural political community. This is a logic of definitive incomprehensibility, of a radical otherness so profound that it cannot be reconciled (Baudrillard, 1993).

At present, amid public discontent stemming from unequal access to the fruits of growth and political polarization, the semantics of recognition and regimes of tolerance face a critical predicament. Movements advocating for the rights of ethnic minority groups have often resorted to maximalist discourses that exclude themselves from shared nationality and raise populist distinctions in which the established power lacks legitimacy, inadvertently reinforcing far-right discourses that employ similar tactics to defend a stance opposed to identity diversity (Kymlicka, 2016).

In this way, the difficulties in resolving the problem of tolerance are exacerbated by the loss of legitimacy of the state, a key entity for the successful coordination of the social systems required to address complex issues such as this one. Indeed, over the past few

years, the state has steadily lost some of its unifying power, mainly as a result of prioritizing the demands of the market and supranational entities at the expense of the requirements of citizens (King & Le Galès, 2017).

This is a central aspect of the problem, since the implementation of a tolerance regime, not being the exclusive domain of any specific social system, requires coordination among multiple systems. Given this multisystemic nature of tolerance regimes, it is worth noting that the debate over redistribution and recognition as dichotomous alternatives overlooks the fact that any system of recognition will be unviable or deeply unstable unless economic inequalities are mitigated. As Fraser (2003, p. 94) states, "[o]nly by looking to integrative approaches that unite redistribution and recognition can we meet the requirements of justice for all".

Indeed, such arrangements must, at a minimum, address issues pertaining to three systems: (1) the political system, aiming at a democratic institutional framework that safeguards the participation of all groups; (2) the legal system, establishing the normative structure that will regulate the order of tolerance; and (3) the economic system, since the necessary mechanisms must be established to prevent the economic marginalization of minorities, which could become a breeding ground for radicalization and armed conflict.

To achieve such coordination, the state represents a key organization, as it has the capacity to establish the necessary couplings to materialize it. And, as is inferred from the above, structures that are not consolidated for tolerance cannot sustain regimes of recognition.

In this sense, while multiculturalism is rooted in a matrix of principles, institutions, and political norms that constitute the spirit of Western liberal democracy, it also poses a series of challenges to that matrix (Modood, 2013). In other words, without a democratic political regime that safeguards individual freedom, guarantees fundamental rights, and enjoys public legitimacy, it is not possible to consolidate a social order in which the semantics of recognition become meaningful and inter-system coordinations sustain structures oriented toward tolerance.

Conclusions

This essay has analyzed, from a perspective grounded in social systems theory, the implications of the spread of the semantics of recognition for social order in the highly complex societies of the 21st century. In this manner, in line with Luhmann (2013b, 2022), identities have been understood as distinctions made by individuals based on the observation of certain cultural matrices or communicational memories of social systems.

From this perspective, the issue of tolerance is seen as an essentially modern problem, stemming from the structural characteristics of contemporary society. Indeed, the proliferation of ethnic identities and identity-based movements is facilitated by the functional differentiation inherent in these societies. This operational scheme, built on function-oriented systems, determines the structural properties and internal dynamics of modern societies (Luhmann, 1982), allowing for greater equity among individuals and, consequently, greater opportunities for access to communication and for the articulation of minority identity claims.

In recent decades, migratory flows have increased and numerous ethnic advocacy movements have emerged. This has led various international entities to adopt semantics and regulatory frameworks aimed at recognizing ethnic minority groups, while there has been a growing interest in examining the issue from the perspective of political philosophy.

There does not, however, appear to be a clear answer to the central problem underlying the issue of tolerance, namely: how to achieve, through inter-system coordination, a social order that reconciles the identity-based claims of different ethnic groups with a shared horizon of belonging that ensures the stability of the political system and the society as a whole.

The path of suppressing or ignoring differences –advocated by conservatives, classical liberals, and republicans who adhere to homogenizing ideologies– to try to enforce loyalty to a common homeland and a republican order with a homogeneous identity, will most likely lead to the deployment of armed violence in response to demands for ethnic identity. An order of tolerance, founded on the pillars of liberal democracy and the rule of law, seems the best alternative for addressing this issue (Habermas, 1998; Modood, 2013; Mosseau, 2022). But the route of tolerance is not without difficulties and has a high probability of failure.

In this regard, it is important to bear in mind that political entities that adopt the semantics of recognition through multicultural structures, on the one hand, run the risk of reinforcing identity-based divisions (Amán, 2015). On the other hand, they are not infallible in their efforts to channel interethnic tensions into democratic structures. Therefore, even within such normative frameworks, armed ethnic conflicts may emerge under certain circumstances.

Recognition of minority ethnic groups through a regime of tolerance is thus a fundamental pillar of social cohesion and democracy in modern society. Notwithstanding, its exacerbation can lead to fragmentation caused by radical identity differentiation and to the discrediting of democracy and the nation-state as a shared horizon of belonging.

The stability of the social order, therefore, appears to be a highly improbable phenomenon in today's highly complex societies. This becomes even more evident in the current context of the delegitimization of democracies, the rise of far-right populism (Fukuyama, 2020; Kymlicka, 2016), and the loss of the state's unifying power (King & Le Galès, 2017), which hinder the achievement of the inter-system coordination necessary to build stable regimes of tolerance.

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