

# How to Respond to Conflicts Over Value Pluralism?

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## Abstract

This paper starts with arguing that the main reason why value pluralism has become conflictual is that it challenges people's socio-cultural identity. The next section gives a summary of recent sociological research on socio-cultural tensions and conflicts in the Netherlands and Europe. They are closely linked to "globalization issues," such as cosmopolitanism, immigration, and cultural integration. This shows that the prediction of the modernization theory, according to which substantial socio-cultural values would be replaced by a universalist, procedural ethics, has not come true. The third section discusses the philosophical reasons of the potentially conflictual character of today's value pluralism: the fragility of socio-cultural identity, the spread of the culture of expressive individualism and the ethics of authenticity, and the influence of the (politics of) recognition of socio-cultural differences. The fourth section discusses two philosophical responses to the conflictual character of value pluralism. First, there is Taylor's plea for a broadening of our socio-cultural horizon and a transformation of our common standards of (value-)judgments, based on his idea of a fusion of cultural horizons. In spite of its obvious merits, Taylor underestimates the degree of cultural distance that characterizes many instances of value pluralism. Second, there is an idea of cultural hospitality, which is an application of Ricoeur's idea of linguistic hospitality to the cultural sphere. It is more modest than Taylor's proposal, since it recognizes the unbridgeable gap that separates different cultures and their values. Another even more modest suggestion to diminish the conflictual character of value pluralism is the virtue of tolerance, which combines the idea that I have good reasons for my value attachments with the recognition that my values are not the completion of the ideal of human existence.

## Keywords

Charles Taylor; cultural hospitality; European value study; fusion of cultural horizons; Paul Ricoeur; socio-cultural identity; tolerance; value-pluralism

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## Introduction

When it comes to understanding socio-cultural conflicts, including conflicts over values, the Netherlands offers an intriguing empirical case, which also helps us to understand similar developments in other West-European countries. Let me start with a recent example of such a conflict, which has caused a lot of social unrest each year since it cropped up for the first time in the fall of 2013. It is about the festival of *Sinterklaas*, celebrated on December 5. Although it has for centuries been the country's most important children's holiday,<sup>1</sup> *Sinterklaas* has recently turned into an annual slugfest of racial politics. To explain what it is all about, I quote from *The Economist* of December 6, 2014:

The problem is the figure of *Zwarte Piet*, an impish clown with a black face who accompanies the bearded St Nicholas (*Sinterklaas*) on his rounds, distributing presents and biscuits. The character is derived from 17th-century paintings of Moorish slaves, and many Dutch with African ancestry find it offensive. Most white Dutch fail to see the problem, and react angrily to accusations that their tradition is racist. The conflict plays out in the media, the schools, the courts and at *Sinterklaas* parades around the country. And it has fed into culture wars between Dutch liberals and anti-immigration populists. [...] Amsterdam, with its leftist politics and large immigrant population, has taken a conciliatory approach, ordering some *Piets* merely to smear their faces to suggest they have climbed down a chimney. (Many white Dutch use this just-so story to excuse the character's skin color, though it fails to explain his curly hair and thick, bright-red lips.) Other liberal Dutch are switching to multi-colored "rainbow *Piets*." But in most Dutch towns, *Zwarte Piet* remains thoroughly blacked-up. [...] All of this grumpiness highlights the difficulty centrist politicians are in. They find it impossible to address their non-white constituents' complaints over racism without angering Dutch whites who do not consider themselves racist.

At first sight, this controversy, just like many other ones over socio-cultural issues, seems like "much ado about nothing," but upon closer inspection, it manifests an important development, not only in the Netherlands but also in many other Western societies: precisely because socio-cultural identity has become multiple and fragile since a few decades as a result of various societal developments, it matters all the more to people as an expression their basic sense of who they are and where they belong. This points to an intriguing paradox: although most people are convinced that cultural traditions and

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1 See e.g. the painting from 1665 by the Dutch painter Jan Steen, *The Feast of Saint Nicholas* (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).

values are but the results of contingent social constructions so that it is pointless to make a fuss about their intrinsic value, these same people are nevertheless deeply attached to them in their daily lives, not so much because these traditions and values would be better, but simply because they are theirs, in other words because they define their socio-cultural identity (Jonkers 2008, 171-176).

Against this background, it is timely to probe, from a philosophical perspective, why socio-cultural identity has often become a pretext for excluding the other, in other words why pluralism has become so conflictual in many Western societies. An even more urgent question is how to respond to these conflicts over value pluralism. To do so, the next section starts with a summary of recent sociological research on cultural diversity and its potential conflicts in the Netherlands and Europe. This empirical material will serve in the third section as the background for a philosophical analysis of today's socio-cultural value conflicts. In the final section, two philosophical ways of responding to conflicts over value pluralism will be discussed.

### **A Sociological View on Value Pluralism and Its Conflicts**

As the European Value Studies (EVS) and many other recent sociological surveys show, Dutch society has gone through a particularly rapid and radical process of modernization in comparison with other European countries since the sixties of the previous century (Arts and Halman 2014; Halman 2015, 33f.). In those days, the Dutch interpreted the modernization of the Netherlands unambiguously in very positive terms, and even considered their country as an exemplar of (religious) tolerance and openness toward different cultures and their values. For many social scientists, the Netherlands served as an empirical confirmation of the modernization theory, which predicted the diffusion of an ethos of individualism and instrumentalism, a procedural, universalist ethics, as well as the fading away of all kinds of social discrimination. The expected result was a society, in which cultural differences would have become irrelevant, reduced to folklore, so that conflicts over substantial cultural and moral values would be a thing of the past. However, history has taken a quite different turn, smashing the image of Dutch society as permissive and tolerant: to the great surprise of many people, including the Dutch themselves, all kinds of socio-cultural conflicts have cropped up since the turn of the century. What is more, these conflicts have become sharper over the years, sometimes even turning into violent confrontations between societal groups over diverging values.

Against this background it is no wonder that, although most people in the Netherlands are happy and satisfied with their lives, two-thirds of the population think that the country is going in the wrong direction. This gloom is not so much inspired by socio-economic issues, as was the case in the first decades after the Second World War, but rather by concerns about increasing socio-cultural pluralism and the value conflicts it generates (Bovens a.o. 2014, 12, 14). To explain this evolution, social scientists point to the growing impact of a relatively recent manifestation of social tension, namely between the winners and the losers of (cultural) globalization (Kriesi 2014, 60-62, 75). The first group consists of people with a positive attitude toward open frontiers, other cultures, immigrants, European unification, etc. Most of them live in metropolises, are highly educated, have a cosmopolitan outlook and a large socio-cultural capital (e.g., they speak at least one foreign language). These characteristics enable them to interpret cultural differences in a non-exclusivist way so that they accept or at least are tolerant regarding the socio-cultural values of others (Koster a.o. 2014, 171). The losers of cultural globalization, by contrast, are confronted with the disadvantages of open frontiers and immigration, and have a more restricted view on society and citizenship. They live mostly in the countryside, and construe their socio-cultural identity through local and national customs, culture, and traditions, and are afraid that these might be forgotten or even lost because of the influx of immigrants and the advance of European integration. The reason for their defensive attitude is that they are afraid that their socio-cultural identity is threatened by the far-reaching and rapid cultural changes in Dutch society during the last decades. Moreover, they feel abandoned by (national) politics, which they suspect of serving only the interests of the cosmopolitan urban elites. Most of them are semi- or unskilled and have less social and cultural capital than the winners of globalization. The confined world, in which they live, explains why they see their own socio-cultural opinions, habits, and values as “normal” or even “natural,” thus making it difficult for them to take an open, non-exclusivist attitude toward cultural diversity and value pluralism (Koster a.o. 2014, 171).

A specific concern about socio-cultural diversity and value conflicts has to do with the socio-cultural consequences of ethnic differences (Ridder a.o. 2014 131-155; Koster a.o. 2014, 165-181). No less than 60% of the Dutch population perceives much or even very much friction between native people and non-Western immigrants (Gijsberts a.o. 2014, 21f.),<sup>2</sup> and almost 40% agrees with

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2 Although since the start of the economic crisis in 2007/08, economic worries overtook for a short time ethnic issues as the most important concern of the Dutch, this trend has reversed again since 2014, and has even increased since the recent terrorist attacks in France and Belgium (Dagevos a.o. 2014, 253).

the statement that the Netherlands would be a nicer country if there were less immigrants (Ridder a.o. 2014, 132f.).<sup>3</sup> In particular, the growing progressive consensus on moral issues (e.g., abortion, euthanasia, LGBT's rights) seems to be restricted to the native Dutch population, whereas many people with a non-Western ethnic origin take a far more conservative stance in these matters. Because this moral consensus has become part of the legislation and of various policies, this has led to an increasing polarization between the native Dutch and people with a non-Western cultural background, and created the impression among the latter group that the Dutch state does not act as a neutral arbiter in these matters, but favors the values and interests of the first group. From their perspective, non-Western citizens want their specific cultural rights (e.g., wearing a headscarf) recognized by Dutch society. Against this background, it is no wonder that, although the difficulties in the socio-cultural relationships between native people and those with a non-Western cultural background involve more aspects than conflicting values, the public debate has been dominated by these issues, as the example of the controversy about *Zwarte Piet* and many other examples show. Last but not least, the growing importance of social media has undoubtedly contributed to the emergence of separate interpretative communities or bubbles, in which people stick to their own value narratives, and blame "the other" for the ensuing conflicts.

An important reason why the ethnic factor of socio-cultural diversity has become much more conflictual in recent years is that younger people with a non-Western cultural background raise their voices more often and louder than the older generation. Many of them have lived in the Netherlands for a long time or were even born there, and do not see this country as a host country (Dagevos a.o. 2014, 276f.). Hence, they want the Dutch, including the politicians, to understand that they wish to be considered as full members of Dutch society and claim the right to participate in the ongoing public debate. Besides being more self-confident, they are also better educated than their parents so that they are able to make their ideas and convictions heard. However, in spite of all these socializing elements, there is ample evidence that young immigrants nevertheless identify strongly with their ethnic group of origin and defend its values in the public debate (Dagevos a.o. 2014, 258f.). Against this background, it is no wonder that they do not want to take the predominant socio-cultural order and moral consensus for granted. Because of their foreign cultural origins, they are far more sensitive to the socio-

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3 However, the researchers note that there are also a lot of people, who disagree with this statement (31%) or who take a neutral stance (27%).

cultural biases of Dutch society than native Dutch people, and lay them bare in the public debate.

Given the recent evolution of socio-cultural diversity and the rise of value conflicts, it is no surprise that tolerance is declining in the Netherlands (Ingen a.o. 2012, 206). Yet, it also has to be noted that people are less tolerant with regard to value differences and deviant behavior than to people with a different ethnicity as such. When asked for people's attitudes toward various kinds of (imaginary) neighbors, it turns out that the percentage of people who object to having non-Western immigrants as their neighbors has remained more or less stable at a low level (8%) during the whole period under investigation, whereas the percentage of people with objections to neighbors with a criminal record, who are heavy drinkers or emotionally unstable, who have a large family, and have extreme right- or left-wing political views has risen consistently: while in 1981, only 24% of these people were considered as unwanted neighbors, in 2008 it had risen to 39% (Ingen a.o. 2012, 206f.). This shows that the kinds of behavior to which people object are primarily related to socio-cultural issues and do not so much have an economic origin, nor are they inspired by outright racist motives.

The distance between the winners and the losers of (cultural) globalization and, in particular, their diverging attitudes toward the values and traditions of the (ethnic or cultural) other and, last but not least, the emergence of separate interpretative communities explains why value pluralism in contemporary Dutch society has become conflictual. Yet, one has to keep in mind that the above division in winners and losers of (cultural) globalization does not suffice as the only explanation for socio-cultural conflicts, since the winners' open-minded, tolerant attitude toward value pluralism only goes as far as it does not affect the core of their socio-cultural identity. The controversy about *Zwarte Piet*, in which many societal groups are heavily engaged, is a clear illustration of the complexity of value conflicts in Dutch society as a whole.

When we make the comparison with cultural diversity and value conflicts in a European context, investigated since 1981 by the EVS,<sup>4</sup> the first, striking correspondence with the Dutch socio-cultural situation is a theoretical one: after four waves of surveys, the researchers had to conclude, contrary to their initial expectation, that the modernization theory had failed insofar as it was supposed to provide the *only* satisfactory explanation of the dynamics of value change (Arts a.o., 2014, 3). To understand (changing) value patterns, one not only has to take into account technological and economic developments,

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<sup>4</sup> The four waves took place in 1981, 1990, 1999, and 2008. For more information about the European Values Study project, see Arts a.o. (2014, 1-5).

as the modernization theory has it, but also cultural traditions and their evolution: “Cultural traditions create forces to sustain themselves even though the circumstances that gave rise and reinforced them in the past may now no longer be relevant” (Arts a.o. 2014, 4).

One of the value domains examined by the EVS deals with the impact of globalization on national identity. Just like in the Netherlands, national identities have remained an essential part of people’s self-identification: across Europe, people are quite proud to be a citizen of their country, and the ways in which they express it range from exclusive or ethnic to inclusive or civic. Yet although the importance of national identities remains intact, researchers note that globalization has reshaped people’s conceptions of what nationhood means, especially among the younger generations. However, just like in the Netherlands, winners and losers of (cultural) globalization, as well as natives and immigrants across Europe perceive national identity very differently. People of foreign origin are less proud of their host country and tend to identify more with their country of origin and people of their own ethnicity. Furthermore, education and living in metropolises enable people to look beyond the borders of their community, nation-state, and ethnicity, thus fostering an inclusive, civic stance toward national identity, whereas the people who have less education and live in a confined community tend to see only the negative impact of the ongoing globalization upon their national identity. This creates a nationalist backlash among the members of the second group, which makes them prone to take an exclusive stance toward people with a different ethnicity (Reeskens a.o. 2014, 57, 62f., 66f.).

Second, the EVS also included an investigation into social distance and tolerance, thereby focusing on people with a different ethnicity as well as on those with socially incorrect or deviant behavior.<sup>5</sup> The conclusions also confirm the research findings from the Netherlands. On the whole, Europeans manifest low levels of social distance toward people with a different ethnicity (Peral a.o. 2014, 129f.). Taking a look at the variables that determine social distance toward these groups, the HDI (Human Development Index) proved to be statistically relevant, thus confirming the results from the Netherlands that higher education plays a positive role in people’s inclusive idea of citizenship, and also fosters their open attitude toward the values of people with a different ethnicity. Yet, the EVS also shows that *all* people, regardless of their educational level, express social distance toward people with socially incorrect

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5 In fact, to specify deviant behavior the EVS asked the same question (“Could you please sort out any that you would not like to have as neighbors?”) and used the same categories as the Dutch study (Peral a.o. 2014, 125, 127).

or deviant behavior (Peral a.o. 2014, 133f.). This result seriously nuances the claim that the higher educated have an open-minded stance in all socio-cultural issues. Rather, the conclusion should be that as long as people with a different ethnicity share the values of main-stream society, it is unlikely that they will be confronted with social distance, but as soon as people's opinions or behavior, regardless of their ethnic origin, differ substantially from the core values of that society, the tendency toward social distance increases among all sections of the population. In other words, although the determinants of socio-cultural identity differ between individual socio-cultural groups, it is of major importance to all of them.

In relation to the findings of the previous paragraph, the EVS also comprises important insights into a specific aspect of socio-cultural values, namely universalism versus relativism in moral issues. In contrast to what the modernization thesis predicted, cultural traditions continue to leave a lasting imprint on the worldviews and values in all European societies, especially in those domains where modernization has eroded the functional basis of traditional moral rules, without being able to provide plausible new ones (Arts a.o. 2014, 1-5.). In particular, socio-cultural traditions have always been very effective in motivating people to commit themselves to substantial values, and to translate these values into concrete courses of action; taking care of the next of kin, especially of the elderly, is a telling example in this respect. In comparison, the formal and procedural ethics of modernity has proven incapable to substitute the motivational and translational potential of these traditions so that the norms of the former risk to remain empty phrases. This is illustrated by the fact the principles of no-harm and self-determination, being the (almost) universally accepted rules for moral decision-making in modern societies, lose a lot of their plausibility when applied to concrete moral dilemmas (Dülmer 2014, 257). Apparently, socio-cultural traditions play a crucial mediating role between universal moral principles and people's moral behaviors in concrete circumstances so that the loss of these traditions leaves people empty-handed in their search for orientation in day-to-day moral issues. What is more, modernization has even widened this tension, as moral principles tend to become ever more formal (or abstract) and procedural, while the moral decisions that people have to take in concrete situations become more and more entangled. Against this background, it should not surprise that (religious and secular) cultural traditions and substantial values continue to mediate between universal, but abstract principles and particular, but at the same time contingent situations in which people act (Taylor 1989, 515f.; Jonkers 2016, 591-601).



### **A Philosophical Explanation of Value Conflicts**

The above sociological analyses show that, even in times of modernization and globalization, we are still strongly attached to all kinds of substantial socio-cultural values. It has to be noted that the term “values” is used here in a very broad sense; it covers a wide range of things and activities that people care about, from day-to-day individual habits, over implicit and explicit norms of social interaction, longstanding (religious or secular) traditions, to substantial ethical values in the strict sense. The basic reason for our strong attachment to socio-cultural values is that they form a general horizon of meaning, against which we define who we are and where and to whom we belong. It is an illusion to think that we could determine our identity autonomously, since it is as much a product of socio-cultural interaction with significant others. We see the importance of this horizon of meaning in our shared stories, legends, and histories, in our festivals with their celebrations and rituals, in our pride of our (sport)heroes, etc. One could even state that personal identity is to a large extent a social product. One of the clearest examples of this is that we express the most intimate elements of our personal identity in a common language; our earliest personal memories are bound up in the lives of others – in our family, school, or city (Ricoeur 2011 81f.). This shows that our attachment to all kinds of socio-cultural values is an important factor in the fabric of today’s societies, since it defines to a large extent our identity.

Yet at the same time, the above has also made clear that, in our times, socio-cultural identity has lost its self-evidence and stability. Technological innovation, economic developments, secularization, individualization, growing mobility, etc. have changed Western societies beyond recognition during the last 50 years. Against this background, it is no wonder that people have problems in answering the question: “What are the substantial values I stand for, that define who I am and where I belong?” In the current situation of cultural fragmentation and fragility, a problematic, yet understandable response to this question consists “in the sliding or diverting that leads the flexibility native to the upholding of oneself in the promise to slip into the inflexible rigidity of character” (Ricoeur 2011, 83). In other words, a lot of people counter the inevitable fragility and contingency of their socio-cultural identity by defining it in a rigid and exclusive way. Again, the *Zwarte Piet* controversy is a telling example in this respect: some people exploit this festival to define a traditional, but contingent aspect of Dutch cultural identity in an atemporal, essentialist way, thereby taking its racist connotation for granted; moreover, in their view, only the native Dutch are entitled to raise their voice in the debate about the “true” meaning of this festival and,

by extension, of Dutch socio-cultural identity as such. It goes without saying that, when the process of socio-cultural self-identification is approached in this exclusivist way, it strengthens the opposition between “us” and “them,” thus making value pluralism more conflictual. So, paradoxically, the recent increase in value pluralism has not made people more flexible in their attitude toward their own values and those of others, but rather the opposite. As soon as people feel that their socio-cultural identity has lost its self-evidence and stability, they tend to hold on to it all the stronger and react in a fiercely negative way against “the threat of the other.”

Another explaining factor of the potentially conflictual character of socio-cultural identity is the fact that people tend to express it far more explicitly than before through their individual behaviors, their (strong) opinions, and their preferences in social interaction. Again, examples of this abound: from expressing a strong opinion that the figure of *Zwarte Piet* is an inherent aspect of Dutch culture or rather a sign of (hidden) racism, over showing our attachment to a certain lifestyle by dressing after a specific fashion, to coming out of the closet regarding our sexual proclivity. As Charles Taylor has shown, all these phenomena are a result of the culture of expressive individualism, which has become a dominant societal characteristic since the sixties of last century. Expressive individualism means that each of us has her own, individual way of realizing her humanity and to live that out, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or by a religious or political authority (Taylor 1989, 374-381; Taylor 1994, 30f.; Taylor 2007, 475). Expressive individuals strive for an intimate contact with their deeper (emotional) selves, and prefer listening to their inner voice and express it through their whole way of life. Moreover, the culture of expressive individualism is not only a matter of fact but also a moral ideal, since people are convinced that they *should* listen to their inner voice and express it publicly through their behavior, opinions, and social interactions. This has resulted in the so-called ethics of authenticity, that is, the idea that a truly fulfilling human life consists in living according to one's authentic self.

A final crucial factor that explains the fragile and conflictual character of value pluralism in contemporary societies is that values, just like socio-cultural identities, are no longer seen as derived from an eternal natural law, the unchangeable will of God, or from a fixed hierarchical social order, as was the case in premodern societies, but are the outcome of social recognition (Taylor 1994, 25-27, 31f., 34f.). The fact that “we are formed by recognition” (Taylor 1994, 64) has made our socio-cultural identity, just like

the values that express it, contingent upon whether or not other individuals, a specific community, society at large are willing to value it. Moreover, through a major part of modernity recognition still had a high degree of stability because it was primarily a matter of the universal, equal, and unalienable recognition of some fundamental values (e.g., human dignity), which were enshrined in the constitution of all modern democracies. But as a consequence of the ethics of authenticity, we are not satisfied anymore with equal recognition, but strive for the recognition of our differences from others (e.g., as persons with a specific gender, sexual proclivity, native language, religion, etc.). In other words, the politics of equal recognition has evolved toward a politics of (the recognition of) difference, that is, the recognition of “the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctness from everyone else” (Taylor 1994, 38). In sum, the principle of recognition has been modified and intensified by the growing importance of *individual* identity and culture-specific values. Consequently, in our times, “we might speak of an *individualized* identity, one that is particular to me, and which I discover in myself” (Taylor 1994, 28).

Obviously, this development has the potential to create fundamental conflicts over values and identities: on the one hand, the principle of equal recognition requires that we treat people in a difference-blind fashion; on the other hand, we have to recognize and even foster particularity, that is, culture-specific values and identities. “The reproach the first makes to the second is just that it violates the principle of nondiscrimination. The reproach the second makes to the first is that it negates identity by forcing people into a homogeneous mold that is untrue to them” (Taylor 1994, 43). The fact that societies are becoming more multicultural and porous is an additional source of conflict in this respect: since the number of culture-specific values and identities that strive for recognition is increasing, and, more importantly, since the principle of the recognition of differences tends to outweigh that of equal recognition, there is a permanent struggle about which of these different values and identities are more meaningful than others and therefore deserve to be recognized. In this context, it is important to note that this striving for recognition of specific socio-cultural values is not only a political affair, coming down to whether or not society should grant so-called minority rights to certain cultural, religious, or ethnic groupings but also a societal matter, in that it comes down to the question which attitude people should take toward the identity and values of the socio-cultural other.

The above explanations lead to the following conclusions. First, the hope that conflicts over values and socio-cultural identities would fade away along

with the spread of modernization has not come true because it rested on the inadequate view that the typically modern formal and procedural ethics, based on the principles of no-harm and self-determination, would be sufficient to guarantee societal homogeneity and supersede people's attachment to specific substantial, culture-specific values. On the contrary, substantial values still define people's socio-cultural identity, their basic sense of belonging, and this all the stronger in times of growing pluralism and cultural fragility. Second, the hope that the conflictual potential of these values and identities would diminish along with the rise of multiculturalism has not come true either. On the contrary, the ethics of authenticity, combined with the growing importance of the (societal and political) recognition of socio-cultural differences, have increased the conflictual potential of value pluralism.

### **How to Respond to Conflicts Over Value Pluralism?**

Given the complexity of the question how one should respond to the (potentially) conflictual character of value pluralism, my response can only be patchy; in particular, it will be confined to a discussion of some ideas of Charles Taylor and Paul Ricoeur about this issue. Furthermore, rather than discussing the political consequences of value pluralism, in particular the problem to what extent the democratic, liberal state should recognize by law-specific group rights,<sup>6</sup> this section focuses on the attitudes or virtues that are needed to respond to this issue in a non- or at least less-conflictual and exclusivist way.

At the end of the above quoted paper, Taylor asks how we should approach the cultures and values of others. His answer is inspired by the presumption "that it is reasonable to suppose that cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings, of diverse characters and temperaments, over a long period of time – that have [...] articulated their sense of the good, the holy, the admirable – are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect, even if it is accompanied by much that we have to abhor and reject" (Taylor 1994, 66). This presumption implies a fundamentally positive attitude toward the values and cultures of others. Although the validity of this presumption can only be demonstrated concretely through the actual study of specific cultures and values, the moral attitude that it requires is a basic willingness "to move in a broader horizon, within which what we have formerly taken for granted as the background to valuation can be situated as one possibility alongside the different

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<sup>6</sup> See e.g. many of the comments on Taylor's provocative paper on the politics of recognition (Rockefeller 1994, 87-98; Walzer 1994, 99-103; Habermas 1994, 107-148).

background of the formerly unfamiliar culture. [This enables us to develop] new vocabularies of comparison, by means of which we can articulate these contrasts. So that if and when we ultimately find substantive support for our initial presumption, it is on the basis of an understanding of what constitutes worth that we couldn't possibly have had at the beginning. We have reached the judgment partly through transforming our standards" (Taylor 1994, 67). It is important to note here that accepting the presumption that the values of others have, in principle, equal worth is not the same as actually judging those other values and cultures, as a matter of right and without further qualification, of equal worth. In other words, Taylor's fundamentally positive attitude toward other cultures should certainly not be understood as a plea for cultural relativism. Apart from the fact that, in the latter case, the issue of justification falls away and is replaced by an expression of liking or dislike, the fundamental problem is that what an unqualified judgment of equal worth actually offers to other cultures and their values is only condescension, not respect (Taylor 1994, 70f.).

For Taylor, every attitude of fundamental respect for the values and culture of others rests on people's willingness to broaden their horizon and to transform their common standards to judge what constitutes worth. For a philosophical underpinning of this attitude, Taylor refers to Gadamer's famous idea of a fusion of (cultural) horizons and develops it further in a more recent article (Taylor 2011). First of all, broadening our value horizon and transforming our common standards of judgment are not one-off events, but ongoing processes. Moreover, they are also mutual processes, in which in principle all individuals and communities are involved. The question then arises how the value communication between these participants, arguing from their respective cultural horizons, takes place. According to Taylor, "the 'horizons' here are at first distinct, they are the way that each has of understanding the human condition in their non-identity. The 'fusion' comes about when one (or both) undergo a shift; the horizon is extended so as to make room for the object that before did not fit within it" (Taylor 2011, 30). So, what is needed to avoid that the dialogue between people belonging to different cultural and value horizons becomes conflictual, is the shift to a "richer language," in which all parties involved can agree to talk undistortively of each other. The crucial factor to realize this is that we allow ourselves, in particular our values and socio-cultural identity, to be interpellated by the other, and refrain from categorizing "difference" as an "error," a "fault" or a "lesser, undeveloped version." In other words, our task is to take the stance of a fundamental openness toward the values of the other, even if they cannot be integrated into our own value horizon, but rather challenge it. Taylor recognizes that

this transformation implies a painful “identity cost” and that the values of the other confront us with disconcerting views of what human fulfillment means. This threat of identity loss explains why people may react to the challenge of value pluralism in an opposite way than proposed by Taylor: they relapse into an unreflected defense of their own, familiar values, and fence themselves off as much as possible from those of the cultural other. The above discussed *Zwarte Piet* controversy is a case in point in this respect. Yet, Taylor is convinced that, eventually, we are enriched by knowing what other values there are in our world (Taylor 2011, 36f.).

I agree with Taylor that broadening our value horizon and transforming our common standards for judging the worth of the values of others are vital conditions for a non-conflictual and non-exclusive response to the reality of value pluralism. Yet, I am afraid that his idea of a fusion of horizons as a model to realize such a response is overly optimistic. Such a fusion is only feasible in a small and relatively homogeneous society, in which cultural differences are not too big, and in which the different societal groups know each other well, are in good faith, familiar with each other’s cultural sensitivities, and willing to respect them. Only then, the participants will feel secure enough to let their cultural identity and their values be interpellated by the other. To illustrate how this model of a fusion of cultural horizons can be effective, Taylor gives the example of the survival of the French language in Quebec, which is a French-speaking province in a predominantly English-speaking country, viz. Canada. In this specific case, a fusion of cultural, in particular linguistic horizons may work, because the Quebecois have most other socio-cultural identity markers and values, especially those on which a liberal democracy rests, in common with the rest of Canada (Taylor 1994, 52-6).<sup>7</sup>

If these conditions are not fulfilled or only to a limited degree, as Taylor admits is the case with value pluralism in Europe (Taylor 2012, 421),<sup>8</sup> the cultural other does not challenge or interpellate my socio-cultural identity and values anymore, since there are too few shared reference points and sometimes even a common language is lacking. On a pragmatic level, Taylor’s hope is “that more open policies may turn the situation [of mutual fear and mistrust against the socio-cultural other] around, and reverse the spiral” of an ever

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7 Yet, in a more recent article, Taylor admits that the issue of socio-cultural identity in Quebec is more complex: “Quebec has become a liberal society, sharing the same basic ethic as other similar ones. [...] But beyond the language and these basic principles, there is an indefinite zone of customs, common enthusiasms (hockey), common reference points, modes of humor, and so on, each cherished to varying degrees, and more by some than by others, whose weakening, abandonment or demise may be feared” (Taylor 2012, 419).

8 Interestingly, Taylor refers to the same phenomena as analyzed in the second section of this paper.

further entrenched alienation, leading to further expressions of anger (Taylor 2012, 422). Although no one knows whether this hope will materialize in the future, the least one can say for the time being is that Taylor's plea for a broadening of our value horizon and a broadening of our standards of judgment through the model of a fusion of horizons is overly optimistic, and falls short of expectations in those cases where it is needed most, namely when a value pluralism becomes conflictual due to substantial socio-cultural differences.<sup>9</sup>

In comparison to Taylor's suggestion that we can solve the conflicts over value pluralism through a fusion of cultural horizons, Ricoeur's ideas are more modest. In one of his later works, he examines the problems and opportunities of translation from one language into another, and expands his investigation to those of understanding the (cultural) other, since, in his view, to understand is to translate (Ricoeur 2006, 24).<sup>10</sup> In this subsection, I will apply his ideas about how to deal in a constructive way with the irreducible heterogeneity of languages and horizons of understanding to the problem of how to respond to value pluralism, since the opportunities and threats are quite similar in both cases. Just like Taylor, Ricoeur stresses the opportunities of translating from or into a foreign language, as well as those of understanding (the values of) the cultural other. They consist in broadening our linguistic and cultural horizon and transforming our usual standards of judgment. Yet, in contrast to Taylor, Ricoeur recognizes that, in these two situations, a fusion of horizons is seriously hampered because of the unbridgeable gap between different languages and different horizons of understanding and judgment. Although humans share the (formal) capacity to express themselves linguistically, there are in fact only individual languages, not a universal language that could serve as an original mother tongue for everyone. In a similar vein, although there may be a consensus between different cultures about some very general values, like human dignity, this common ground evaporates as soon as one descends to the level of concrete socio-cultural opinions and practices. Hence, just like between different languages, there is a gap between different socio-cultural horizons and their related value systems. Again, the *Zwarte Piet* controversy offers an excellent illustration of how the general value of socio-cultural identity can be interpreted in radically opposite ways by different communities. Hence, socio-cultural identities and their related value systems are, just like languages, fundamentally heterogeneous symbolic systems. This means that Ricoeur, who is just like Taylor convinced that the opportunities

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9 For a more detailed critique of Taylor's ideas about intercultural dialogue, see Jonkers (2019).

10 For an excellent introduction to Ricoeur's philosophy of translation, see Kearney (2007, 147-159).

of dialoguing with the linguistic or cultural other clearly outweigh the threats, has to develop an alternative, less ambitious model to communicate with the linguistic or cultural other than that of the fusion of horizons.

To make communication possible in a context of linguistic heterogeneity, in other words in a world “after Babel,” translation is crucial, since we have no immediate access to the linguistic other. This is also true for translation in a broad sense, that is, when we want to understand the (cultural) other, since we have no immediate access to her either, even if she speaks the same language as we. Moreover, translation is not only necessary for the understanding of the other but also for understanding ourselves, since what is our own has to be learned just as much as what is foreign (Ricoeur 2006, 29). Therefore, to understand our own language and ourselves, we have to take the detour of (the language) of the other.

Ricoeur summarizes the opportunities of translation with the catchword “linguistic hospitality”: it carries the double duty “to expropriate oneself from oneself as one appropriates the other to oneself” (Ricoeur 2006, 10; Kearney 2007, 150f.). Expropriating ourselves from ourselves implies that we give up our longing for linguistic self-sufficiency and the illusion of a perfect translation and a fusion of linguistic horizons. Yet, translation also offers an opportunity: by appropriating the foreign language to ourselves, we become aware of the specific expressive possibilities and idiosyncrasies of our native language as well as those of the foreign language. This multifaceted learning process explains why the desire to translate goes beyond constraint and utility. In sum, the opportunity of linguistic hospitality consists in that “the pleasure of dwelling in the other’s language is balanced by the pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home, in one’s own welcoming house” (Ricoeur 2006, 10; see also 26-9).

What can we learn from Ricoeur’s theory of translation for our dealing with value pluralism? First of all, we have to acknowledge that the dissemination of value horizons is just as much part of the human condition as linguistic dissemination. Our deeply embedded longing for self-sufficiency explains our resistance against this dissemination and our opposition against expropriation. This longing also explains why value pluralism can so easily become conflictual, and why the confrontation with the (values of) cultural other is often experienced as a threat to our socio-cultural identity. Yet, this longing for an undisturbed, fixated identity is just as illusory as the longing for an absolute, pre-babylonian linguistic homogeneity. Instead, we have to accept that value pluralism is just as fundamental as linguistic heterogeneity. Thus, there will always be something incomprehensible in the culture and values of



the other, just like there will always be something untranslatable. The same holds true, paradoxically, for the understanding of our own language and culture, as human beings are never fully transparent to themselves.

However, just like learning other languages expands our linguistic horizon, thus compensating the loss of linguistic self-sufficiency with the awareness of the possibilities and idiosyncrasies of our own and the other's languages, a dialogue about value pluralism offers similar opportunities. They consist in an enhanced awareness of the specific characteristics of our own and the other's value systems and socio-cultural identities, thus preventing the deadlock of self-enclosure. In an even stronger way than Taylor, Ricoeur highlights the fact how vital it is for us to expand our value horizon so that we can learn from other value systems. In particular, through this learning process, we discover our own socio-cultural identity through that of the other. The term cultural hospitality aptly expresses this attitude. It symbolizes the respect for the otherness of the cultural other, her irreducible strangeness to me, while acknowledging the opportunities that a dialogue about diverging value systems offers.

Yet, in spite of all its merits, it is doubtful whether the idea of cultural hospitality is sufficient to defuse the conflictual character of value pluralism, as the persistence of the *Zwarte Piet* controversy and many other socio-cultural conflicts show. We all know that there are intellectual and practical limits to cultural hospitality, especially if the heterogeneity of socio-cultural identities and value systems tends toward incommensurability, and if there is a lack of self-reflexivity among the socio-cultural groups involved in these conflicts, in other words if these groups are unable to give up the illusion of cultural self-sufficiency. Moreover, the plea for cultural self-reflexivity can be accused of being elitist, only within reach for highly educated, as the sociological analysis of value conflicts in the second section of this paper has shown. Unfortunately, the dynamics of these conflicts is anything but reflective, but rather fuelled by people's immediate feeling that their socio-cultural identity is threatened by increasing pluralism.

In situations like these, it makes sense to appeal to the virtue of tolerance, not in the hope that it could eliminate conflicts over value pluralism once and for all, but rather that it can diminish them. This hope rests on the fact that tolerance puts the bar of our engagement with the socio-cultural other still lower than cultural hospitality, let alone than a fusion of socio-cultural horizons. In an intriguing paper on various kinds of tolerance, Ricoeur defines one of them as the virtue to "neither approve nor disapprove of the reasons for which you live differently than I do: but perhaps these reasons express a relation to

[the] good that escapes me because of the finitude of human understanding” (Ricoeur 1996, 191). Unlike a nowadays popular kind of tolerance, which consists in an attitude of indifference toward the socio-cultural other and her values, the virtuous and hence costly kind of tolerance that Ricoeur pleads for requires me only to give up the claim to exclusivity of the values I cherish. Yet, this does not mean that I should abandon these values and the reasons for my attachment to them altogether. Furthermore, this kind of tolerance requires that I reach out on equal terms toward the socio-cultural other, by entering into a conversation with her about her reasons for being attached to her substantial values. Such an open conversation presupposes an attitude of modesty regarding my own values, in particular the acknowledgment that the values to which I am attached can never fully and unambiguously cover all aspects of the ideal of human existence, since this ideal is inexhaustible. Such an attitude of modesty prevents me to use my values as a means to exclude those of the other, who tries to give shape to this ideal from her perspective.

Stemming the tide of exclusivism against the values of the other rests on the insight that they are expressed in a (practical and conceptual) language that differs fundamentally from my own. Hence, the virtue of tolerance rests on the recognition that there is *some* truth in the values of the socio-cultural other, although this truth may be inaccessible to me. Moreover, the implication of the fundamentally equal terms of the conversation with the socio-cultural other is that everyone is in an equivalent position to that truth. Indeed, the virtue of tolerance presupposes the awareness that my socio-cultural values are not equal to the Truth (with a capital T), that I do not possess the Truth, for the simple reason that the Truth is not only supreme but also inexhaustible. Instead, I can only hope to be *in* the Truth (Ricoeur 1996, 194f.). Again, because this shape of tolerance is focused on the *reasons* of my and the other’s attachment to diverging substantial values, it does not require the conflicting parties to give up the existential truth of their substantial values for the sake of peace and quiet. Rather the attitude of socio-cultural modesty, which underlies the virtue of tolerance enables people to avoid the deadlock of socio-cultural exclusivism, which can so easily turn into violence.

## Conclusion

This paper has made clear that values and value pluralism are anything but a purely theoretical affair. Taken in a broad sense, values stand for everything we, as individuals or as a group, find worthwhile. Hence, values define to a large extent who we are and where and to whom we belong, in other words our socio-cultural identity. Due to various recent societal developments,

many values have become far more diverse and fragile, but this does not at all mean that we would be less attached to them. On the contrary, we tend to express our attachment to these values far more openly than before, and strive for their public recognition. However, greater value divergence, the culture of expressive individualism, and all kinds of claims to the recognition of values have increased the risk of conflicts over value pluralism, as the controversy over *Zwarte Piet* in the Netherlands and many other examples clearly show.

Against this background, the question is how to deal with value pluralism in a non- or at least less conflictual way. The combined answers of Taylor and Ricoeur have shown that the confrontation with the values of the other inevitably implies giving up the idea of an immediate, fixed, and self-enclosed identity, or to put it sharper, the illusion of a homogeneous universe of values, in which we could lead a socio-culturally undisturbed life. Yet, acknowledging this reality does not automatically lead to cultural relativism, an unqualified acceptance of a wide plurality of values, but only requires us to recognize that other cultures offer, in principle, a valuable contribution to redefining what human fulfilment means, or phrased negatively, to acknowledge that our values are not the completion of human values as such. To appreciate the values of other cultures, we need to be prepared to broaden our value horizon and transform our common standards of judgment. Realizing such a shift through a fusion of horizons, as Taylor argues, seems only possible under very specific conditions, which are typically not fulfilled in the current debates about value pluralism in Europe. In comparison to Taylor, Ricoeur's proposal of cultural hospitality is not only more modest but also more promising, since it starts from the recognition of the fundamental heterogeneity of values and socio-cultural identities. This makes it easier to accept that there will always be something in the values and culture of the other that eludes our understanding. Ricoeur also offers an important argument why it is important for us to accept the challenge of value pluralism. Only by accepting the test of the values of the other, in other words thanks to cultural hospitality, we are able to learn from these other values. What is more, cultural hospitality also enables us to get a better understanding of ourselves, since our only access to our own values is through those of the other. Yet, it may be so that, in the current socio-cultural climate, these prospects are overblown and that we should be satisfied not so much with a non-conflictual way to deal with value pluralism, but rather with a less-conflictual one. The virtue of tolerance and the attitude of (intellectual) modesty on which it rests seem promising in this respect, even though one has to realize that it can only be acquired through a sustained effort and a socio-cultural community that is willing to support it.

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