

Public Deliberation in a Globalized World?

The case of Confucian Customs and Traditions

*Elena Ziliotti*¹

Abstract: The question of how democracy can deal with cultural diversity has become more central than ever. The increasing flow of people to many Western democratic countries indicates that our societies will become more and more multicultural. But what is the best way for democracy to deal with cultural diversity? It has been argued that, given its communicative core, the Habermasian model of deliberative democracy provides a platform where cultural groups can concur on peaceful agreements. In this paper, I show the limits of this model of democracy in relation to diverse cultural traditions to public interactions. I will discuss the case of societies and ethnic groups of a Confucian heritage and show that Habermas' account of public deliberation is not a neutral method for facilitating political decision making, but is culturally biased.

1. Introduction

The multicultural question—that is, how distinct cultural groups can coexist in the same society—poses a challenge to the structure of democratic legislative mechanisms. Political theorists have often pointed out that members of a pluralistic society disagree not only on questions about morality, but also about social justice (Kukathas 2003: 123). Different communities within the same society may hold diverse views on the limits of freedom of speech, education, public holidays, what social behaviors can be tolerated and what must be forbidden. Thus, the presence of a plurality of views and traditions within the same society makes it hard to understand how such aspects of social life could be organized to accommodate all views.

One important aspect of the multicultural question concerns the relationship between multiculturalism and Western liberal demo-

¹ elena.ziliotti@kcl.ac.uk, National University of Singapore & King's College London.

cratic political systems. Isabel Awad calls this issue the problem of ›critical multiculturalism‹. Critical multiculturalism emphasizes the tension between the socio-political structures of a society and the identity of its minority groups (Awad 2011: 41). In particular, critical multiculturalism is concerned about the ability of current democratic institutions to balance the interests of the majority and the aspirations of minority groups. These latter, by virtue of their different traditions, often aim to advance structural changes to the receiving society. As Awad further explicates:

What is in the interest of Latinas/os in the US, of the Moroccan-Dutch in the Netherlands or the Pakistani-British in the UK is the advancement of structural changes that would allow them to speak the language they speak—whether it is Spanish, Urdu, Arabic, Berber, English, Dutch or a combination—, eat the food they want to eat and listen to the music they want to hear [...] and at the same time, be fully enfranchised with respect to the law, as well as to educational, occupational, material, and political resources. (Awad 2011: 44)

That is, the eagerness of some newcomers to be fully part of the new society occurs alongside their desire to live according to their own culture and traditions. In this sense, »multiculturalism is concerned with cultural claims that are actually tied to structure and are fundamentally justice-oriented« (Awad 2011: 44). For, in general, when the majority shares the same culture, traditions or religion, the democratic political system tends to prioritize their interests over the claims of minority groups, which tend to receive less public representation and public support. Democratic political games can therefore leave the minority's claims for structural changes unexpressed, reinforcing their disenfranchisement.

In recent years, multiculturalism has also been a central topic of several philosophical debates. Will Kymlicka (1995) has famously claimed that liberal societies need to accommodate the most important concerns of minority groups by giving them special rights, while others have rebutted that policies allowing minority groups to associate in pursuit of their distinctive ends pose a threat to the social justice of society as a whole (Barry 2001; Arneson and Shapiro 1996). Another view has been defended by Awad (2011), who argues that Habermas' conception of deliberative democracy is particularly receptive to the demands of multiculturalism. According to Awad, the Habermasian idea of public deliberation—a non-institutional dimen-

sion through which different individuals can deliberate and develop mutual understanding—offers a valuable way for democracy to deal with the multicultural question (2011: 39).

In contrast, the present paper argues that Habermas' deliberative democracy is not a satisfactory response to the multicultural problem. The Habermasian model of deliberative democracy lacks sufficient equipment for including minorities in the deliberative process, for studies in comparative philosophy have shown that cultural groups have different traditions on matters of communication. More specifically, this essay focuses on the case of ritual communication in Confucian traditions in order to show that Habermas' idea of public deliberation is not neutral toward the social practices that different communities have developed over time to negotiate conflicting views. The norms that govern Habermas' deliberative model of democracy differ significantly from the ritual norms that govern the way disagreements are usually conceived of and handled in Confucian societies. Public discourse and verbal interaction are also used in Confucian cultures, but they develop in a very different way from the one assumed by the Habermasian deliberative model. The issue, here, is not a difference between Western verbal deliberative practises and Confucian non-verbal rituals. The problem is more complicated than that because there is a difference also in how individuals with different cultural traditions approach and conceive discursive argumentation. I argue that people of Confucian traditions would be disadvantaged, if political decisions in a multicultural society were resolved through the Western discursive argumentative form assumed by Habermas.²

The discussion in this paper is organized as follows: Section 2. briefly explains Awad's adaptation of the Habermasian model of deliberative democracy to critical multiculturalism. Section 3. then ex-

² Ram Adhar Mall raises a similar point against Habermas. Mall thinks that despite a pluralism of principles in Habermas' deliberative model, it is almost impossible to defend a very strong version of consensualism (Mall 2000: 39). The reason is that if »a communicative model, with its structures of communication action, pertains to a particular culture, then it is still not possible to defend the universality of these structures« (2000: 39). Both Mall and I point to the cultural bias of Habermas' communicative model, but Mall focuses on the actual possibility of reaching a consensus, while I deny the neutrality of this communicative model in relation to the cultural traditions in interpersonal communication.

amines the limits of this deliberative approach in relation to different cultural traditions.

2. Public deliberation as multicultural arena?

Deliberative democracy is one of the most popular positions in democratic theory at the moment. Since the 1990s, the concept of deliberative democracy has gained weight in the Western debate on democracy mainly as a reaction against aggregative models of democracy. Deliberative theorists contested the assumption of aggregative models that the democratic decision-making process ultimately consists in the aggregation of people's preferences to determine the majority that should decide the outcome. According to deliberative theorists, aggregative accounts ignore an important aspect of democratic society: namely, the series of un-selfish confrontations and debates preceding democratic political decisions (Bohman 1997: xiii). Aggregative models of democracy fail to understand that ultimately what characterizes democracy is the deliberation on political issues carried out by officials and citizens, not voting or majority rule.

Other scholars have claimed that aggregative models of democracy are normatively problematic. A just conception of democracy presupposes the so-called principle of *deliberative equality* which aims to assure citizens equal conditions to engage in the deliberative fora, without any form of discrimination. Aggregative models of democracy are unjust because they provide citizens with unequal chances to access and actively participate in the deliberative process and influence the decisional outcome. In this regard, aggregative models of democracy deprive many citizens of the possibility to truly challenge the current distribution of power while favouring the status quo with regard to political issues (see Gutmann and Thompson 2004: 16).

The debates on deliberative democracy involve different accounts of public deliberation: from ordinary talk among citizens (Mansbridge 1999) to more sophisticated, consensual forms of rational discourse (Cohen 1989, 1996). But despite their differences, deliberative democrats emphasize the importance of reasonable and fair debate among people to justify democratic political decisions. Deliberative theories maintain that public deliberation is the main source of *legitimacy* and *political authority* of a democratic system (Cohen 1996; Christiano 1996; Dryzek 2000; Gutmann and Thompson 1996,

2004). Unlike aggregative models of democracy, central to deliberative conceptions of democracy is the idea that »when citizens or their representatives disagree morally, they should continue to reason together to reach mutually acceptable decisions« (Gutmann and Thompson 1996: 1). Deliberation is therefore how citizens in a democracy can legitimately arrive at collective decisions (Cohen 2007: 222). In this sense, public deliberation is far more than instrumentally valuable for the legitimacy of the political system. Rather, it is part of what a legitimate political system requires.

Awad (2001) claims that the concept of deliberative democracy developed by Habermas offers a suitable ideological apparatus for critical multiculturalism. According to Awad, »[o]verall, what makes deliberative politics particularly appealing as the democratic platform for critical multiculturalism is its communicative core« (2011: 51). Viewing communication as the key instrument of political participation grants deliberative democracy a significant advantage over alternative democratic models with respect to the multicultural question. Unlike other democratic theories, »[t]he kind of communication that derives from Habermas' theorization does not presuppose understanding and a common interest, but enables it« (Awad 2011: 52).³

Habermas' conception of deliberative democracy is based on the idea of practical discourses, which are highly focused discourses in which the aim of participants lies in resolving the normative dispute to the satisfaction of all (see Chambers 1996: 98). By virtue of being a specific kind of practical discourse, political and legal discourse is responsive to what Habermas conceives of as the overarching ›discourse principle‹: that justifications offered in the deliberative process should be impartial. That is to say, a rule is valid only if all those affected by it could accept it in a reasonable discourse (see Habermas 1996a: 107). In this regard, one controversial assumption of Haber-

³ Note, however, that Awad's use of the term ›communication‹ is not strictly Habermasian. Habermas' idea of ›discourse‹ differs from his account of ›communication rationality‹. Where the former involves normative claims about norms, the latter, communicative rationality, involves factual claims about norms (see Blau 2011: 47). In this sense, although public discourse can lead to communicative rationality, the two are significantly different. Only »[d]iscourse starts when there is a ›lack of a normative consensus‹ (TJ, p. 256; emphasis added)« (Blau 2011: 48). For this reason, Awad's use of the term ›communication‹ is not strictly Habermasian—it is so only to the extent that it expresses the kind of communication that derives from Habermas' ideal discourse, namely ›deliberation‹ (Awad 2011: 52).

mas' deliberative model is the idea that general consensus is possible on matters of political disagreements, because citizens are thought to be able to separate moral constraints from pragmatic and political considerations when working to find acceptable solutions. This assumption has been challenged both on pragmatic and theoretical grounds (Bohman 1996; Warnke 1999; McCarthy 1998). For this reason, today many deliberative theorists support majority rule rather than consensus as a way to bring deliberation to an end.

For Awad, Habermas' deliberative model of public deliberation is both procedural and participative (Awad 2011: 50). On the one hand, public interaction allows citizens to express and develop their common-identity through structured dialogue; and, on the other hand, norms and a common-will emerge from the participative process of the public. Thus, »[a]lthough the requirements of equal respect and impartiality contain substantive moral assumptions about how we should talk to each other, they are still formal in that they do not determine how the conversation will turn out or even what we should be talking about« (Chamber 1996: 101). The deliberative structure aims only to specify »the fair terms of participation in which everyone has equal standing« (Bohman 1996: 43).

According to Awad, the lack of predetermined ethical goals is one of the aspects that make the Habermas' model of deliberation receptive to multiculturalism. »In Habermas' normative model of communication, to deliberate is to engage in society's reason-based dialogue, oriented toward common understanding, held among all citizens, and free from strategic action (i.e., from the influence of power and money)« (2011: 50). Similar to the condition of deliberative equality discussed above, Habermas envisions a strict normative model of deliberation. According to Habermas, deliberation is characterized by the idea of a respectful communication process in which citizens participate as equals. Political discourse should give equal hearing to all sides and allow citizens to develop their arguments and influence each other through persuasion and argumentation. Furthermore, all parties must be willing to regularly scrutinize their beliefs, conventions, and practices. Together with these conditions for deliberation, reciprocal respect promotes reciprocal understanding among the parties and encourages the rise of common civic goals (Awad 2011: 52).

The requirement to include minority groups in the deliberative process is supposed to provide every citizen with the equal opportunity to participate in the deliberative process. »Inclusion means that

the political community stays open to include citizens of any background without confining those Others within the uniformity of a homogeneous national community» (Habermas 2001: 73). For this reason, the inclusion of minority groups in the deliberative process aims to provide the conditions for a more attentive consideration of group interests, facilitating their participation in the legislative process by involving them in the public dialogue. The inclusion of groups in the political sphere can guarantee minority groups sufficient visibility to shape the public agenda (see Awad 2011: 52). Although the legislative power is restricted to the political system, it is the public opinion—as communicative power—which can »point the use of administrative power in specific directions« (Habermas 2002: 116).

From the perspective of democratic theory, the public sphere must, in addition, amplify the pressure of problems, that is not only detect and identify problems but also convincingly and influentially thematize them, furnish them with possible solutions, and dramatize them in such a way that they are taken up and dealt with by parliamentary complexes. (Habermas 1996a: 359)

Thus, inclusion in the deliberative process facilitates the influence minority groups can have on political parties, as it advances their demands for structural adjustments of the democratic institutional apparatus.⁴

3. The cultural limits of deliberative democracy

Habermas' deliberative model of democracy assumes that the only force that matters in public deliberation is »the unforced force of the better argument« (Habermas 1996a: 306). He considers arguments as »reasons proffered in discourse that redeem a validity claim raised with constative or regulative speech acts; thus they rationally moti-

⁴ Habermas (1996a) limits the use of deliberation to only those communication processes wherein collective norms are to be considered valid and universal. Habermas believes that part of the public sphere should not be administered by deliberation and several decisional systems, such as negotiation and voting, should characterise the legal and political realm. This belief puts Habermas at odds with other deliberative democrats, such as Cohen (2002) and Mansbridge (1999), who require deliberation in the numerous sorts of civic and political associations.

vate those taking part in argumentation to accept the corresponding descriptive or normative statements as valid» (Habermas 1996a: 225–226). Effective communication requires groups to have sound communication skills, because »[p]ublicity is the common perspective from which citizens mutually convince one another of what is just and unjust by the force of the better argument« (Habermas 1995: 124).

One problem with Habermas' deliberative model is that it does not take into account unequal pragmatic abilities among groups to participate in public deliberation. Commenting on the debate in UK after the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, Bhikhu Parekh argues that the communicative difficulty of British Muslims to articulate their reasons in the debate was one of the main causes of the violent incidents. »Muslims attempted to articulate their reasons in a liberal language but found it extremely difficult to do so both because they had few bicultural literate intellectuals, and because no such conceptual translation will ever be accurate« (Parekh 2005: 305).⁵ This suggests that the various groups' differential pragmatic abilities to use a common language can hinder mutual understanding, which in turn can undermine public multicultural discourse.

Similar issues concerning the communicative skills of the deliberating parties have prompted some democratic theorists to elaborate a more nuanced conception of deliberative equality. For example, according to James Bohman (1997), Jack Knight and James Johnson (1997), deliberative equality requires granting citizens equal opportunity to influence the deliberative process if so they wish. However, this can be achieved only if citizens have equal chances to develop the cognitive capacities that are needed to advance and defend persuasive claims in the deliberative fora. As education training is the primary way through which individuals develop these capacities, equal opportunity for education is necessary for achieving deliberative equality (Knight and Johnson 1997: 245–246). A similar substan-

⁵ For Parekh, the debate failed not only because of the unequal pragmatic ability among the groups to participate in the debate, but also because the impossibility for the Muslims to express some of the reasons of their distress by *The Satanic Verses* in a liberal language. Muslims had no objection to religious criticisms, but they »wondered why mocking, lampooning religious believes, practices and prophets should be confused with genuine and serious criticisms« (2005: 305). However, »since these reasons are not part of the liberal world of thought, liberals had difficulty appreciating their nature, relevance and force« (2005: 305).

tial conception of deliberative equality is proposed by Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thomson (1999) and John Dryzek (2000). In Dryzek's view, people need to have equal opportunities to acquire the skills and the capacities that are essential to actively participate in the deliberative arena. This entails equality of material conditions, but also equal opportunity for all individuals to acquire communicative competence, such as »the capacity to raise and challenge validity claims« (Dryzek 2000: 70–1).

Besides the questionable assumption of the equal ability to use a common language, Habermas' deliberative model assumes also that cultural groups share similar views on what is »persuasive« or »reasonable«. After the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, most British writers understood the Muslim questioning of why free speech should include untrue and deeply offensive remarks about religious beliefs as »an opposition to free speech, whereas Muslims failed to understand the grounds of the liberal emphasis on free speech and the depth of British commitment to it« (Parekh 2005: 304–305).⁶

Responding to these criticisms, deliberative democrats argue that there are different ways to limit the problem of unequal epistemic and pragmatic competence among the parties involved. First, deliberation presupposes interlocutors with an »enlarged mentality« by imagining judgment from the standpoint of others (see Benhabib 2002: 142). Secondly, many deliberative democrats would rebut that Parekh's observation may beg the question: if there is indeed a lack of understanding or conceptual divergence among the parties, people should simply talk more to understand each other. In other words, the debate on *The Satanic Verses* should not be seen as a counterargument against deliberation, but rather as a case for more deliberation.

While these counterarguments in defense of the more complex nature of the multicultural problem are forceful, I believe that another kind of difference among cultural traditions undermines the effectiveness of public deliberation with respect to cross-cultural dialogue. Habermas' deliberative democracy is rooted in a verbal concep-

⁶ Similar to Parekh, Iris Young (2000) highlights the correlation between the kind of reasons that are acceptable in the deliberative process and the idea of deliberative equality. »The dominant mood may find their [minority groups'] ideas or modes of expression silly or simple, and not worthy of consideration. They may find that their experiences as relevant to the issues under discussion are so different from others' in the public that their views are discounted« (Young 2000: 56).

tion of communication where different individuals and parties interact only through a specific kind of dialogue. For this reason, this model requires not only equal technical skills of the parties involved and a shared understanding of the kind of reasons that should be accepted in the deliberative process, but also their equal predisposition to engage in public verbal encounters of this kind. However, some cultures have specific norms of public deliberative discourse as well as other intellectual and ethical norms than those assumed in Habermas' version of public deliberation. For example, many members of societies and ethnic groups of a Confucian heritage have different ideas and customs in relation to argumentation compared to those of a Western heritage.

Confucianism is a complex and extremely diversified intellectual tradition that started in the 5th century BC. It developed originally in China as one influential school of thought and later was embraced by the ruling circles to become the official ideology of the imperial state. During the Han dynasty (206 BC–220 AD), the adoption of the Five Confucian Classics became the core curriculum in the examination system and the basis for Confucian education in imperial times (see Møllgaard: 230). However, Confucian state ideology differed from Confucianism as a doctrine mainly because the former was characterized by strong Legalist influences. Legalism—one of the main political traditions in China—emphasizes the use of harsh punishments and blind obedience. In contrast, Confucius recognizes the value of freedom, although he does not advocate a legal protection of free speech in terms of individual rights. In the *Analects*, Confucius says that a ruler who finds pleasure in everyone agreeing with him will ruin the state (*Analects* 13.15). Whereas, Xunzi—one of the most influential Confucian philosophers—considers »those who remonstrate, wrangle, assist, and oppose [...] true ministers of the altars of soil and grain. They are real treasures to the country and its ruler« (*Xunzi* 13/64/5). Furthermore, some of Confucius' teachings express his conviction that the recourse to censorship as a coercive means of preventing others from misusing speech is a failure of ethical excellence (Tan 2004: 182).

Although Confucianism has often been used by government elites to promote their own agenda through the manipulation of Confucian ideas, its function as state ideology was not merely to whitewash the legalist practice of Chinese rulers. Many Confucians in the government elites recognized the discrepancy between their moral commit-

ment and the legalist state and they decided to serve the regime only up to a point.

They did not support the state at all costs. Many tried hard to turn the ruler in the direction of good government, sometimes at the risk of their careers and even their lives. While their collective efforts never quite achieved the Confucian ideal government, it is likely that Confucian influence in government contributed considerably to the welfare of the people, and at times it curbed some of the excesses of despotism. (Tan 2004: 199)

From the elite circles, Confucian ideas spread to other segments of the mass citizenry »to become a cultural movement embracing all of China« (Shin 2011: 25). The influence of Confucian traditions spread from China to neighbouring countries and other regions, and today Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Singapore remain most profoundly Confucian states in East Asia (see Shin 2011: 28).

Confucianism traditionally emphasizes that a good life is first and foremost characterized by rich and diverse social relations. For this reason, Confucian ethics generally considers human flourishing as constituted by harmonious social relations—whether in the family, society, the world, or with nature. From a Confucian standpoint, harmony means peaceful order or, minimally, the absence of violence. Therefore, conflict should be dealt with through a non-violent approach, aiming at establishing peaceful relations. To maintain a peaceful order, Confucian traditions and customs tend to avoid unregulated confrontations in public, while bringing into play specific forms of verbal communication and also non-deliberative systems of communication. In the Confucian tradition, a vast set of social behaviours and practices articulate reciprocal social interactions. Rituals constitute one important kind of such practices. Originally, ritual practices were considered one of the arts of Confucian education (together with music, archery, calligraphy, charioteering and mathematics). As Sor-hoon Tan explains,

these ritual practices began as attempts to communicate with nature, with cosmic forces, with ancestors, to bring satisfactory outcomes to joint human enterprises. Participants in ritual practice communicate with one another—acknowledging their interdependence and reaffirming their mutual trust and commitment to their shared goal. As the ›magical‹ element loses its importance or credibility, its communicative aspect becomes more important and ensures the persistence of ritual practice. (2003: 80–81)

Ritual practices began to refer to the conventions and courtesies through which members of a community submit to the socio-ethical order. They were considered to regulate the performance of important social and religious ceremonies, such as sacrifices, weddings and funerals, but also various daily acts of deference. The aim in ancient Confucianism to regulate daily life through ritual practices is expressed in one of the Five Confucian Classics. The Book of Rites contains in fact not only prescriptions for major events, such as sacrifices to ancestors, but also the proper forms to express filial piety and all kinds of daily etiquette, such as the request not to slurp one's soup.

Ritual practices extend to both verbal and non-verbal communication and aim to foster in the members of the community specific ways of conduct, or patterns of behaviour (Tan 2003: 80). One main reason beyond the Confucians' attention to some cultural conventions and performative acts, such as greetings and making requests, is the conviction that social harmony can be achieved through ritual practices. For this reason, ritual regulations are considered activities that create values and make the world a better place to live in. Thus, rituals are considered a »process of humanization« (Tu 1972), where aesthetic creativity and social harmony are achieved at the same time. In Confucian doctrine, self-assertion is considered detrimental to achieving collective welfare and social harmony (see Chan 1999: 219–22), while ritual practices enact a communicative system that aims to enhance understanding towards others and favours cooperation when required.

In conflict situations, the predisposition toward a harmonious resolution and the avoidance of an adversarial stance can have a significant impact on the outcome. Polite and nonconfrontational postures, facilitated by ritual acts understood by all, even in situations of a serious conflict of interests, are not always simply hypocrisy; they are, in fact, powerful means of increasing the chances of an outcome acceptable to all. (Tan 2003: 84)

That, in Confucian doctrine, ritual regulation concerns public interactions on political issues is shared by David Hall and Roger Ames: »Ritual action establishes conditions and bonds relationships at every level of human experience, from one's own introspective dialogue to the broadest social and political matrices« (Hall and Ames 1987: 89). In Chinese society, for example, rituals are communicative modes involving multiple aspects of life:

[Ritual] involves the performance of any formalized, meaning-invested conduct that organizes particular human beings in community. Thus, ritual spans everything from table manners to court ceremony, from living familial relations to observance for the dead [...]. At the communal level, rituals encompass social and political institutions, from family to government. Rituals are the language through which Chinese culture is expressed. (Hall and Ames 1999: 204–205)

These forms of social practises are still followed by many members of Confucian societies or groups of Confucian heritage. Recent studies relying on public opinion surveys and statistical analysis confirm that many East Asians are still saturated with Confucian habits and mores, although sometimes without their awareness. According to Doh Chull Shin, harmonious relationships in face-to-face interactions continue to be a primary aspect in the informal sphere of the civil society in Confucian Asia (see 2011: 117). Similarly, by analysing the case of three Confucian societies—China, Hong Kong and Taiwan—Yu-Tzung Chang, Yun-han Chu and Frank Tsai, conclude that traditional Confucian values, such as social harmony, remain strong in the face of modernization (see 2005: 25).

Of course, although some Confucian traditions remained the mainstream of the cultural and political movements in many East Asian countries, their development took also different paths as they encountered native or other cultural traditions (see Shin 2011: 28). In this sense, Confucian ethics should be considered as the product of a transformative process over time, rather than a static set of moral principles. This conception of Confucian traditions is in line with the new anthropological understanding of culture invoked by James Tully (1995) and articulated by Michael Carrithers (1992), Clifford Geertz (1973) and James Clifford (1988).

Tully proposes to consider culture as »overlapping, interactive and internally negotiated« (1995: 10). Cultures are not simply overlapping, but they exist because of a process of interaction among each other (1995: 11). They are also not internally homogeneous. They are contested, transformed and negotiated by their members but also by other cultures. »The identity, and so the meaning, of any culture is thus *aspectival* rather than essential: like many complex human phenomena, such as language and game, cultural identity changes as it is approached from different paths and variety of aspects come into view.« (1995: 11, my emphasis) In this regard, my analysis of some Confucian communicative practices aims to recall the attention on

the specific aspect of interpersonal communication in Confucian tradition. This aspect is fluid and open, rather than closed and static. As societies with Confucian heritage have modernized, new customs that carry out the similar communicative and harmonizing function of ancient Confucian ritual practices have emerged.

This phenomenon is particularly evident in China, where fast modernization and the Party's turn to capitalism paralleled the change of many social practices. Daniel Bell (2008) argues that Confucian rituals are still in effect and sometimes adapt to the new socio-economic conditions of contemporary China, while preserving their harmonizing effect. According to Bell, one example is the boss-worker relationship. China's economic boom has forced millions of workers to move from the villages to the cities and many of the workers who migrate live in harsh conditions and are severely exploited. Some expression of ritual practices aiming at harmonizing the boss-workers relationships can be often observed. Bell notices that one often sees »migrant workers in the restaurant trade being »subject« to group lectures, forced to undergo morning exercises, and sing group songs and chant company slogans« (2008: 50). Although these practices may look quite militaristic, some of them aim to develop concern in the boss for the workers' interests, because the boss himself participates in the exercising and singing, sometimes even »joking with the workers« (2008: 50).⁷

The emphasis on pursuing social harmony as the primary goal of interpersonal interactions is also reflected in the use of verbal communicative styles in interpersonal conflicting situations which are unusual for many Westerners. Such as, the preference for agreeable answer to questions, when factual answers are perceived as unpleasant or threatening others' face; the use of self-deprecation in discussing one personal contributions and achievements in order to convey to others one's own intention to maintain group harmony (Akimoto and Sanbonmatsu 1999). Another example concerns how cultural

⁷ Bell discusses also the controversial case of singing in karaoke sex bars. He argues that this practice can be seen as a new Confucian ritual practise to the extent to which singing together helps the customer to develop a sense of care and concern for the well-being of the hostess (and vice-versa), which can lead to bonding and mutual concern (see 2008: 64). However, unlike the case of the boss-workers relationship described above, it is hard to see how the karaoke-style prostitution could be an example of Confucian rituals especially because, as pointed out by Møllgaard, this practice clashes with the Confucian emphasis on family (see 2012: 232).

groups tend to understand and use silence in public interactions. According to Liu (2016), in general the Chinese understand silence as a control strategy. Silence is seen as an initial reaction to conflicting situations that allows the parties to calm down and take time to think about how to manage the conflict. In contrast, studies have revealed that European Americans tend to see talk as a means of social control, while reserving silence for intimate relationships. The case of silence is particularly relevant for the topic of this article, because it emphasizes the contrast between the Chinese view of interpersonal conflict management and deliberative views of democracy. In fact, unlike the former, deliberative theories of democracy assume more talk to be the best solution to a lack of understanding and the best way to understand each other.

Assessing Habermas' deliberative model in relation to traditions in illiberal societies, such as authoritarian China is not a weak point of my argument. First of all, it is essential to remember that Confucian traditions are not only a ›Chinese thing‹, but they are present around many parts of East-Asian countries, some of which are fully democratic. Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, all abolished restrictions on social mobilization and political speech and embraced democratic forms of governance. Second, the compatibility of Confucian legacy with democratic practices is advocated by several political theorists. In this regard, Sor-hoon Tan's *Confucian Democracy: A Deweyan Reconstruction* (2004) and Sungmoon Kim's *Confucian Democracy in East Asia: Theory and Practice* (2014) are some of the most noteworthy works in contemporary Confucian democratic theory, where a democratic regime with Confucian features is envisioned for modern East Asian countries. Tan argues that early Confucian ideas are compatible with a specific form of participatory democracy. »For Confucians, political order involves more than the official government: it is about everyone doing what is right and proper in whatever social contexts one finds oneself« (Tan 2014: 99). For this reason, the Confucian ideal of social relation »is consistent with a participatory conception of democracy that locates participation not only in national electoral politics but in local contexts where people deliberate on matters with public import« (Tan 2014: 99).

Another reason to believe in the compatibility of Confucian legacy with democratic practices is that democracy has a strong support in many so-called Confucian countries. For example, most South Koreans believe that democracy is the best political regime as well as

the best way to formulate and implement policies that affect citizens' lives (Shin 2011: 275–282). At the same time, South Korea is one of the most Confucian societies in East-Asia. As Byong-Ik Koh (1996) points out, today most of South Koreans practice the basic Confucian rituals and subscribe to Confucian values. Survey data show that Confucian values, such as social harmony and filial piety, have still dedicated support among the South Korean population. 84% of the interviewees are at least partly attached to the value of aversion to conflict, 71 % prefer to avoid clashes with their neighbours even if doing so means yielding to them, and 61 % consider it essential not to be assertive at the workplace (see Park and Shin 2006: 347).⁸

These considerations suggest that a model of democracy which is primarily based on Western verbal deliberative practises can fail to align not only with the traditional Confucian doctrine, but also with the version adopted by modern Confucian societies and groups of Confucian heritage. These groups have developed their own understanding of argumentation and conduct their arguments in a specific way. As the case of the workers and the boss shows, some groups with Confucian heritage not only have developed non-verbal communication practices that allow the community to mediate their interests, they also have a particular way to make recourse of verbal interactions. In this regard, Confucian traditions are not hostile to public discourse. On the contrary, they reveal a different way to see and perform verbal interpersonal mediations, apart from the one practiced by many Westerners and implied by current models of deliberative democracy.

Thus, minority groups (like groups with Confucian heritage) can have a different and perhaps more sophisticated understanding of interpersonal arguing than the one presupposed by Habermas' deliberative model of democracy. Since Habermas' deliberative democracy is rooted in a specific, structured verbal conception of communication, this model of deliberation fails to provide a suitable answer to the multicultural problem. As I explain in the first section of the article, deliberative theorists criticize aggregative models of democ-

⁸ The attention to harmonious social relations is not a unique commitment of Confucianism. Together with communal peace, social harmony is also a central commitment in the *Ubuntu* tradition of sub-Saharan Africa. According to *Ubuntu*, a disagreement among members of the clan can be overcome only by reaching a 'harmonious agreement' in which everybody agrees on the decision taken and equally participates in the discussion (Gade 2012; Bell D. and Metz T. 2011).

racism because they value both public deliberation in democratic societies and deliberative equality, namely the idea that a democratic decision-making process must assure citizens equal conditions to engage in the deliberative fora, without any form of discrimination. The case of Confucian customs and traditions undermines the deliberative equality of Habermas' theory of deliberation by revealing the possibility that some minority groups could be unequally equipped to actively participate in this form of deliberation. In practice, members of such cultures would be potentially disadvantaged, if multicultural issues were handled exclusively through argumentation lacking norms that promote harmony in the process. Our analysis of Confucian customs and traditions reveals also the possibility that some minority groups could perceive a certain structured verbal model of public deliberation as ultimately ›confrontational‹, if this is exclusively based on ›the force of the better argument‹ and devoid of norms and intersubjective practises that promote harmony in the process.

The point I am making here is not that deliberative democracy necessarily implies adversarial and confrontational public discourses. Habermas did not intend to develop a confrontational model of public communication. Moreover, as I have explained in the previous section, there is an overwhelming consensus among deliberative democrats on the importance of mutual respect. However, the Confucian case shows a striking difference among the communication systems that some cultures have developed over time. Consequently, the inclusion of minority groups may be difficult to achieve without the prior understanding that some non-Western cultures have developed, not only different concepts of ›reason‹ as suggested by Parekh, but different practices as well as diverse understandings of ›inclusive communication‹. Confucianism and deliberative democracy as practiced by many Westerners are alternative ways through which different cultures might disagree and try to resolve their divergences when collective decisions are at stake.

If people from different cultural backgrounds and ethnic groups can strongly differ not only in communicative abilities but also in relation to their dispositions towards argumentative interaction, then Habermas' ideal of deliberative democracy seems to be unsuitable to host unbiased and inclusive communication among cultural groups. Habermas' inclusion requirement could give minority groups more visibility, but it fails to provide the necessary conditions to assure

their equal inclusion in the deliberative process. For this reason, deliberative democracy may risk reproducing the same problem that it aimed to resolve: although it aims to include the others, it is exactly its communicative structure that retains some of the intra-groups differences that prevent this inclusion.

The cultural differences discussed above might constitute not only a limitation of Habermas' conception of deliberative democracy, but arguably a challenge to any form of public deliberation that is based entirely on a specific idea of verbal communication. A deliberative theorist cannot acknowledge the cultural bias of deliberative democracy and still defend it as the best method for establishing public opinion and for facilitating political decision in a multicultural society. The reason is that, regardless of the majority's opinion, any process to reach political decisions affecting the entire society will be unfair and fail the principle of deliberative equality, if it systematically advantages the members of some members of the society while disadvantaging others.

Neither can the incompatibility of some groups' cultural communicative predispositions with deliberative practices be a reason for emphasizing discursive communication. The reason is that the problem does not concern only the incompatibility of the modes of communication that different groups use to resolve or avoid conflicts. The problem is more complicated than that because it concerns the tension between the communication modes of some minority groups and the communication structure that is supposed to mediate among the different groups. Thus, ›more discursive communication‹ is not a viable solution to the problem discussed here, because it is precisely the structure of discursive communication which is not neutral to cultural groups.

These differences exclude the possibility for multicultural communication to be based on a specific kind of public deliberation or Confucian rituals. Confucian rituals are indeed an effective means to inclusive communication, but their function is culturally specific (Tan 2005). In other words, their role and practice are rooted in Confucian culture more than others. Nevertheless, Confucian thinking about rituals can help us understand issues concerning cross-cultural communication and interactions better by directing our attention to the social-normative aspects of social relations and cooperation relevant to multicultural communication.

A further complication concerning the problem of multicultural

interactions is the possible presence of multiple minorities in multicultural societies with divergent predispositions to engage in public verbal interaction. This phenomenon suggests that the problem of the minority inclusion may not be reduced to a mere disparity between Western societies of Greco-Roman heritage and Confucian heritage minority groups. Unfortunately, the problem is much more complicated than that, because traditions of public reasoning may vary among minority groups as well.

Habermas' ideas about religion are often applied to intercultural questions to explain how his deliberative model can accommodate different cultural views. However, I do not think that similar explanations can be offered in relation to the problem of communicative practices examined in this article. Habermas' analysis of religion derives from his concern about the plausibility of his account of political deliberation under pluralistic conditions in which citizens hold a variety of different (secular or religious) outlooks or worldviews. Habermas' ideas on religions are applied to intercultural questions because it is believed that sometimes religious views and cultural traditions influence individuals' behaviour in similar ways. According to Habermas, religion is a source for individuals' worldview, a set of beliefs, like philosophy or science, that shapes how individuals understand the world and themselves.⁹ In contrast, I have assessed Habermas' account in relation to another characteristic aspect of pluralistic societies, namely the presence of traditions in communicative practices among citizens which differ from the ones assumed by Habermas. This question remains surprisingly unexplored by Habermas.

⁹ If in his early thought, Habermas believed that religious worldviews were ultimately irrational and therefore they should evolve into modern and rational worldviews. »[O]nce it was confronted with the rival claims of science and profane morality, Christianity could no longer satisfy this demand. Here, then, philosophy must step into its place.« (1974: 95). Habermas' current thought is more positive about religion. Habermas has recognized that religion is also a source of energy which marks the actions and the social interactions of the faithful person in society. Religious views »[...] inspire and encourage us in our repeated efforts at cooperatively bringing about the good, and thus offer regenerative power for a dwindling normative consciousness« (Harrington 2007: 47).

4. Conclusion

Socioeconomic circumstances are changing the demographic makeup of many Western democracies. Immigration has recently become a necessity for many European countries. According to population projections, the populations of several European countries are shrinking at a fast rate. In one generation, Germany will have a population of the same size as France, even though it has currently almost ten million more. Italy will lose five million people in less than one generation (World Population Prospect 2008). Thus, the increasing flow of people together with the European need of immigrants pose a compelling case for the multicultural question.

With the emergence of new social conditions, the relevance of critical multiculturalism, that is the tension between the socio-political structures of a society and the identity of its minority groups, has become more and more tangible. The main goal of this paper was to think through the deliberative process in relation to the problem posed by critical multiculturalism. I have argued that Confucian norms may require a very different mediation process from the one proposed by Habermas. The reason is that deliberative democracy, as it is usually conceived by many Western scholars, is unsuitable to host unbiased and inclusive communication among cultural groups and more serious attention should be given to the minority groups' predispositions to non-verbal and verbal interactions. I have attempted to show the limits of deliberative democracy from a cross-cultural perspective, by pointing out that also the different cultural predispositions to public confrontation should be carefully considered. These are critical issues that any attempt to include minorities should consider carefully. Cultural studies and comparative philosophers have shown that cultures have different verbal and non-verbal ways to manage their disagreements and to take collective decisions when these are needed. These considerations undermine the ability of Habermas' theory of deliberative democracy to include minorities who do not share similar values and norms of public deliberative discourse.

Admittedly, the present paper does not offer a solution to critical multiculturalism. The problem of minority inclusion in public deliberation, although a pressing issue, remains unsolved. However, Confucian thinking about rituals may help us to focus our attention on different aspects of social relations and interactions, and hopefully

also allow us to better understand the problems of cross-cultural communication and cooperation.

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