CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE
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Bachelor Thesis

Contemplating the binary bind between cultural relativism and universalism: from theoretical critique to practical considerations

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Prague 2016

I declare that I have written this Bachelor Diploma Paper myself and on my own. I have duly referenced and quoted all the material and sources that I used in it. This Paper has not yet been submitted to obtain any degree.

In Prague, 24th June 2016 signature*: _____

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Abstract

I contemplate the antinomy between the cultural relativism and universalism and the ways how to surpass this relationship. I assess the problematic within the scope of anthropology, and include certain philosophical/political debate. I approach the issue from both cultural relativistic and universalist position. I introduce both cultural relativism and universalism concepts with their related discussions, followed by dialectical approach to 'concrete universal'. I provide historical background of the concept of cultural relativism and also discuss the related concept of 'culture', which I analyze in critical examination of the terms essentialism, identity politics and multiculturalism. Then, I examine the concept of human rights in relation to anthropology, universalism and cultural relativism as a potential candidate to reconcile this binary. After, I briefly discuss anti anti-relativism. I conclude with idea that recuperates cultural relativism through the perspective of universalism.

Key words: cultural relativism, universalism, culture, essentialism, concrete universal, multiculturalism, identity politics, human rights

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1. Introduction: Comparison and Context

Distinguishing between cultural relativism and universalism, and the complex ways in which they crosscut, is the gist of this essay. Although seemingly two opposing terms, cultural relativism and universalism are not going to be presumed as entirely antagonistic. Most briefly, cultural relativism is an anthropological approach in which actions in particular culture should not be judged based on the values of another, for they are all 'correct' in relation to their respective cultural norms. While on the other hand, in universalism, something general is sought, a basis for collective authenticity of men, something where the same principles can be applied to all mankind. In this thesis, I look closely to the debates surrounding the issues of cultural relativism and universalism, while I also provide reasoning for the third approach, *i.e.* to look for the commonalities in the concepts of cultural relativism and universalism and to reconcile them.

Before I continue with the discussion, I first present the outline of the structure of this essay. After a brief introduction to the issue of cultural relativism and universalism, I give a detailed explanation of both terms. The part about universalism is somewhat longer, because I have introduced the concept not just as an anthropological, but also as philosophical-political category, exemplified in Slavoj Žižek's dialectical approach to *concrete universal* (Žižek 1999).

In the second part of the essay, I continue with the discussion about cultural relativism, provide a historical background of the concept and also discuss the related concept of 'culture.' After that, I provide a critical examination of the terms such as essentialism, identity politics and multiculturalism in order to show how both cultural relativist and universalist approaches function when they are put in practice.

In the third part, I analyze the concept of human rights in relation to anthropology, universalism, as well as cultural relativism and the surrounding problematics. I particularly focus on two human rights critiques by Sally Engle Merry (2003) and Kirsten Hastrup (2003), which I analyze in light of Žižek's theories.

In the last part, I include a brief discussion of the anti anti-relativism, introduced by Clifford Geertz (1984), whose concept recuperates cultural relativism through the perspective of universalism.

A presentation and reconciliation of the cultural relativism–universalism binary follows the Hegelian triadic process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis: essentialism of abstract or neutral universalism as the thesis, anti-essentialism of multiculturalism and identity politics as the antithesis, and anti anti-essentialism of concrete universality as the synthesis of the two. In this discussion, I explain why these terms are important, and what are the main issues and questions related to them.

Although cultural relativism is in a much closer stand to my personal views, I argue that the current global social and political situation dictates some kind of a common language across cultures if the humanity wants to progressively deal with global issues, such as environmental threats, and economic, racial, and gender inequality, to mention only few. I endeavor to understand whether the human rights discourse can provide such a universal common point, without renouncing the cultural relativist perspective. I find this topic relevant from anthropological stand point because anthropology cannot just detach itself from these current socio-political issues as a neutral by-stander, but also because the debate about cultural relativism and universalism also points to the adequate understanding of the current humanity: we cannot limit ourselves anymore to separate cultures, but we have to study cultural phenomena from the global perspective.

2. Part I. "Everything is General in General but Particular in Particular": Cultural Relativism and Universalism

Clifford Geertz
(Geertz 1983:150)

The main idea of this text is a contemplation of a relationship between cultural relativism and universalism, or in the words of Thomas Hylland Eriksen: "to what extent do all humans, cultures or societies have something in common, and to what extent is each of them unique?" (Eriksen 2001:5). The conceptual and ethical tension among the two carries a particular weight in anthropology, as well as in other social sciences. These two concepts are usually presented as binary opposites, both implicitly or explicitly laden with value, and exclusive to each other. A venture into the territory of relativism often leads to a categorical rejection of universalism. Moreover, universalism is often ill-defined. Its diverse meanings and political potentials are not recognized and are often misunderstood. To understand this problematic better, I provide detailed accounts of both concepts.

2.1. Cultural Relativism

Scholars recognize different types of cultural relativism. For instance, they differentiate between cognitive or epistemological cultural relativism, and moral or cultural one (Barnard and Spencer 1996:478).In both of them, there is an emphasis or notion that most things we do, as humans, are relative to each other. Scholars, who are dealing with these concepts, deny that there is a viewpoint which is uniquely privileged more than any other.

Among these different kinds of relativisms, cultural relativism is a method favored in anthropology (Barnard and Spencer 1996). Anthropologists in support of the cultural relativism believe that actions in particular culture should not be judged based on the criteria from another culture. They see the cultural diversity as the essence of humankind and treat all cultural world

views as equally valuable in order to understand them better and to use that knowledge for the advancement of anthropological discipline. Hence, it is inappropriate to think in terms of hierarchy between cultures, because different cultures have different priorities and values.

An implication that all people from all over the world are equally human was not widely accepted historically. Even today, in some parts in the world exist the negation of universal equality among people endures. It was common for white, middle class, male, and heterosexual Europeans to perceive 'others' as inferior, based on their skin color, gender, sexuality, and class. For instance, one of the biggest sport figures of the twentieth century – the recently deceased Muhammad Ali – after winning Olympic gold medal in Rome in 1960[i] was refused to be served in the restaurant owned by 'white' people. The reason was simple as it was incomprehensible: racism.

One of the first advocates of anti-racism in anthropological field was Franz Boas, often called a 'Father of American Anthropology.' His reaction to racism was the following: "No one has ever proved that a human being, through his descent from a certain group of people, must of necessity have certain mental characteristics" (Boas 1945:52). His main idea of fighting chauvinism, racism and ethnocentrism is 'historical particularism,' which claims that individual cultures should not be compared hierarchically, but studied in their own regard (Kottak 2011:296). Boas' new way of looking at culture was also a form of cultural relativism.

Cultural relativists' main tool is *ethnography*, or doing "fieldwork in a particular cultural setting" (Kottak 2011:9). The aim of cultural relativists is to understand foreign societies without prejudices, which is best achieved through the *emic* perspective, *i.e.*, taking into account the native's point of view.

Unfortunately, cultural relativist position bears certain limits. This point of view works fine until cultural relativists face human rights violations. One of the often cited examples among anthropologists regarding harmful 'traditional' practices, such as female genital mutilation (FGM), is used as an exemplary case often used against the concept of cultural relavism.

Merrilee H. Salmon, for instance, states that anthropologists should abandon the position of scholarly observers and should get involved and work on the elimination of these abusive practices, and to criticize and challenge them (Salmon 1997).

But such extreme cultural relativist positions, which are indifferent to the risky practices, are not necessary the only way how cultural relativism can be employed. In the current anthropological literature, for example, cultural relativism is usually understood as a methodological position: "Anthropologists employ cultural relativism not as a moral belief but as a methodological position: In order to understand another culture fully, we must try to understand how the people in that culture see things" (Kottak 2011:39). A position which evaluates child labor as nonjudgmentally as volunteering in Red Cross exists only in theory. Salmon criticizes this position which seems to maintain neutral stance on anything in order to comprehend all cultures on equal grounds, without criticizing them, or seeking to improve them. However, anthropologists who are doing their fieldwork are not following this principle blindly. Scholars can still be relativists, but that does not mean they have to approve of or be indifferent toward social injustice or human rights abuses in different cultures. In summary, cultural relativism is not a moral belief, but is employed as a methodological position for the purpose of better understanding of other cultures.

For example, Merry is one of the anthropologists who explains that cultural relativism position is misinterpreted, because both the anthropologist's stance and the concept of culture are often misconceived among the general population (Merry 2003). Lila Abu-Lughod makes a similar, if not the same point by saying that a way of presenting and analyzing culture as something static, homogenous, and independent is wrong. Culture is dynamic, adaptive and porous, and it must be studied in that manner, so that everyone gets a better picture of what cultural relativism stands for (Abu-Lughod 1991). By misunderstanding the concept of culture, one misunderstands the cultural relativism.

I discuss this further in one of the following chapters of this essay. Even so, I would recommend using a culturally relativistic lenses to understand the methodology of why certain practices and beliefs work for a particular culture, and then, to use one's own set of morals and values to investigate how that culture fits into personal cultural framework.

2.2. Universalism

The ideas of cultural relativists are often contrasted with the ideas of scholars propagating universalism. Cultural relativists stand for diversity of people and their cultures as the essence to humankind. The universalists are doing the opposite – they emphasize the similarities within the humankind (Eriksen 2001:8). They are stating that there are essential human values and patterns common to all existing cultures. Out of those common patterns, they are making grand cross-cultural theories, which are supposed to explain the nature of man.

In this text, I discuss universalism from both anthropological and philosophical-political perspective.

One of the proponents of universalism in anthropology is Donald Brown. According to him, "universals at the level of the individual are particularly likely to be close to human nature or to be actual elements of human nature - at the core of which are the evolved problem-solving mechanisms that constitute the human mind" (Brown 2004:48). Brown (1991) elaborates on already established distinction between universal, the generalized, and the particular: "Certain biological, psychological, social, and cultural features are *universal* – shared by all human populations. Others are merely *generalized* – common to several but not all human groups. Still others are *particular* – not shared at all" (Kottak 2011:35; emphases added). This statement is questionable, especially from the cultural relativist point of view: we are not able to seize and completely understand psychological traits, social features and cultural meanings each particular culture that exists in this world. Because of that, it is very hard, if not impossible, to list and compare them without imposing an ethnocentric perspective.[1]

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[1] Ethnocentrism, usually contrasted with cultural relativism, represents belief that one's culture is superior to other cultures (Kottak 2011:53).

"Cultural universals" are cultural traits presumably shared across all cultures, for instance exogamy[2] and incest taboo[3]. In my opinion, cultures should not be evaluated based on their similarities: there are always exceptions and deviations from standards which should not be omitted. These 'similarities' function differently within different cultures: Ruth Benedict emphasized this point that cultures are uniquely patterned and integrated in her famous book *Patterns of Culture* (Kottak 2011:298). Universalists are sometimes simplifying complex cultural concepts, reducing them to the patterns they are later able to compare with similar concepts from 'other' cultures, making them appear universally homogenous.

In his earlier scholarly phase, Geertz believed that "universals are empty containers that give an illusion of similarity where there is dramatic variation" (Beck and Maida 2015:277). However, in his essay *The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man* (1973), Geertz does not disregard completely universalist viewpoints, or universalism as such. In *The New York Times* magazine article about Geertz's book *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) a journalist writes: "In one direction is the world of culture, diverse and unimaginably complex. In the other is the world of nature, immutable and universal. And though Mr. Geertz has now spent many years on the faculty at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, his career has been spent following one path while trying to hold the other in view."[ii] Geertz accepts that there is something universal between cultures, but contemplates on how to approach this question scientifically.

Geertz suggests in this regard that: first, universals can be found in every culture everywhere, but the scientists should approach this task 'empirically'; and second, after these conditions are met, cultural universals can be successfully connected with the "established constants" of human life (Geertz 1973:38). By 'established constants' of human life, Geertz refers to biological, psychological, and social layers, the conceptions of human life which are constant and can be studied empirically.[4] Following from this premise, scholars can explore which cultural traits are essential for all human lives (Geertz 1973:38).

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[2] Practice of marrying someone outside of one's community (Kottak 2011:34).

[3] Incest: "Incest and its prohibition or avoidance are closely related social phenomena". Some anthropologists oppose this view (Barnard and Spencer 2010:371).

[4] Those mentioned layers of human life are assigned and inarguable. Geertz also calls them 'stratigraphic' elements, in sense that man is to be 'hierarchically stratified animal' (Geertz 1973:37).

Contemplating universalism, Geertz first considers the religion as a possible candidate for cultural universals, but he soon discards the, because "the obsessive ritualism and unbuttoned polytheism of the Hindus and ... the uncompromising monotheism and austere legalism of Sunni Islam" are too different (Geertz 1973:40).

In his distinguished text based on 1984 lecture *Anti Anti-Relativism*, Geertz makes an effort to defend the idea of cultural relativism, and at the same time to mock universalists, and other anti-relativists, implicitly saying that their statements can lead to class and race discrimination: "Whatever cultural relativism may be or originally have been (and there is not one of its critics in a hundred who has got that right), it serves these days largely as a specter to scare us away from certain ways of thinking or toward others" (Geertz 1984:263). By "certain ways of thinking or toward others" (Geertz 1984:263) Geertz refers to chauvinism and racism and other ethnocentric beliefs. Our history has shown us that universalistic position can lead to disaster. We do not need to go as far as the 19th century when humanity was divided into 'civilized men' and 'savages' to make a point. It is enough to look back to Nazi Germany to see how ethnocentric beliefs had dreadful consequences in Europe. Even more recent examples are 'ethnic cleansings' in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda, events from just two decades ago.

2.3. Concrete Universality

Slavoj Žižek, a contemporary Slovenian philosopher and cultural critic also discusses the idea of universalism (Žižek, 1999), but from a more philosophical and political perspective, which is, as I argue here, also important for the anthropological discussion about cultural relativism and universalism.

Žižek finds 'neutral universality' (a phrase coined by himself), represented in the form of common features shared by all of humanity, as a false universality. However, referring to Hegel, he suggests another type of universality, termed 'concrete universality,' which is more useful for him in light of current philosophical and political debates.

In his book *The Ticklish subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (1999), Žižek discusses Hegel's distinction between 'abstract' and 'concrete' universality. The reason I endeavor to overcome this complex relationship between the concrete and abstract universal outlined by Žižek (and Hegel)[5] lays in the resemblance of this particular distinction with the relationship between cultural relativism and universalism. Consequently, the dialectical approach to articulate the 'true concrete universality' represents the dialectical relationship between cultural relativism and universalism.

Thus, I am going to present a succinct version of the Hegelian opposition between 'concrete' and 'abstract' universality, followed by interpretation of Žižek's own ideas.

The most important distinction between *concrete* and *abstract* universality is related to their names – *concrete* universality is universality that is manifested in a concrete and particular situation; while *abstract universality* represents its opposite, something not concretely specified, existing only in the form of an abstract concept. However, concrete universality, in Hegel's dialectic, derives from abstract universality, with the progression from thesis (a thing 'in itself'), through antithesis (a thing 'for itself'), to synthesis (a thing 'in and for itself').

In his book, Žižek demonstrates how the abstract universality is transformed into concrete universality with Hegel's example of 'individualization through secondary identification' (Žižek 1999:90). He identifies primary identification in the example of family membership (thesis), as an 'organic' community, governed by 'spontaneous' relationships.' Secondary identification, on the other hand, exists in the form of national citizenship (antithesis, also 'abstract' universality), as an 'artificial', or abstract community consistent of mediated relationships among its members.[6]

However, in Hegel's dialectic, this binary scheme between thesis and antithesis is reconciled through the process of synthesis. Universal secondary identification thus becomes concrete universality only "when it reintegrates primary identifications, transforming them into the modes of appearance of the secondary identification (say, precisely by being a good member of my

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[5]Based on Žižek's argument that Hegel was misinterpreted on this issue by his critics.

[6] Another example of the secondary and primary identifications presented through the contrast between Plato's *Euthyphro* and *Antigone*[6]: Euthyphro prosecutes his own father for the death of their servant. In this case, Euthyphro forsakes his family in favor of the universality of law. In contrast, Antigone renounces her civic obligations in favor of her familial obligations.

family, I thereby contribute to the proper functioning of my nation-state)" (Žižek 1999:90). Žižek explains this process further in the following way: "Therein lies the Hegelian difference between 'abstract' and 'concrete' universality: the universal secondary' identification remains 'abstract' in so far as it is directly opposed to the particular forms of primary identification – that is, in so far as it compels the subject to renounce his primary identifications; it becomes 'concrete' when it reintegrates primary identifications, transforming them into the modes of appearance of the secondary identification" (Žižek 1999:90). Individual thus becomes a true and autonomous individual only when he or she not only opposes his primary identification (family, as thesis) through secondary identification (nation, as antithesis; also as abstract universality), but foremost when successfully reintegrates both of them through the process of synthesis into a form of concrete universality.

Žižek gives another example of how this works with reference to religion: being a good Christian in the realm of Christianity (as abstract universality), is achieved through the opposition to existing social order (as thesis, opposed by Christianity as its antithesis); concrete universalism is thus only achieved through the process of synthesis of both realms when a good Christian partakes in the social world around himself (synthesis of thesis and antithesis), and *incorporates* himself or herself into social order (Žižek 1999:91).

With this interpretation of Hegel's examples, Žižek commences his dialectical process aimed at finding a 'true' concrete universal, which can be useful for today's socio-political situation. This concept of 'true' concrete universal is for him precisely that kind of universalism that I find useful for the main discussion in this essay. For that reason, I present here the intellectual efforts to designate the 'true' concrete universality:

Žižek presents three versions of concrete universality, as defined by various scholars and philosophers and establishes a relationship between the universal and its particular content (Žižek 1999: 100-101):

1. 'Neutral universality': Cartesian *cogito*, same in everyone, regardless to gender, ethnicity etc. This concept of universality is completely indifferent to its content;
2. 'Symptomatic universality': Here, previous 'neutral universality' is exposed. It shows that particular content, *e.g.* a white male property owner, is hidden behind this 'neutral'

universality. Expected neutral content, *e.g.* some 'true' universality of a modern individual is therefore not expressed here. 'Symptomatic' universality is identify in this sense as a symptom of a form of domination that has an interest in disabling particular differences behind the appearance of neutrality, which is in favor of a particular subjectivity. This universality is an ideological falsehood, ideological illusion, and a mere facade. This universality is not included in all if its particulars so it does not fulfill Žižek's notion of concrete universality.[7]

3. 'Hegemonized[8] universality,' exemplified by Ernesto Laclau[9]: universality is purely formal, empty, and it needs to be filled with a particular content. It is 'empty' universality, and it can be only hegemonized by a particular content that will act in its place as the universal. Žižek interprets this universal as "the battleground on which the multitude of particular content fight for hegemony" (Žižek 1999:101). This is an open-ended concept, never-ending in its application, and as such, always open for 're-hegemonization.' The main character of this universal is the struggle for its hegemonization.

Žižek is critical of all three options, because universal, as understood in all three cases, is always a particular (hegemonic) subjectivity disguised as universal: "The Universal always asserts itself in the guise of some particular content which claims to embody it directly, excluding all other content as merely particular" (Žižek 1999: 101). In order for the universality to become 'true concrete' universality, it cannot remain separate or indifferent from its particular content, but must include itself among its particulars (Žižek, 1999:92).

Žižek proceeds with his search and explanation of the 'true' concrete universality that can at the same time negate (antithesis) and reconcile (synthesis) with the existing social order. This two-step progression is achieved in the following way. In the first part, the social order is negated through political struggle, which then enables "post-revolutionary reconciliation between demands of social Order and the abstract freedom of individual" (Žižek 1999:94). Significantly, this "reconciliation" is an ambiguous term – "it designates reconciliation of a split (the healing of

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[7] If the male property owner is not occupying the universal, then any particular stand in is good as any other.

[8] Hegemony: Dominance or forced leadership, usually by one country over the other. Hegemon is the dominating leader.

[9] Political theorist.

the wound of the social body), as well as the reconciliation with this split as the necessary price of individual freedom" (Žižek 1999:95). In this sense, the reconciliation is never total, and there always exists a 'gap' or 'split' that demands further political action. In this way, the 'true' concrete universality is "forever prevented from acquiring a figure that would be adequate to its notion" and "there is universality only in so far as there is a gap," Žižek concludes (Žižek 1999:103).

Žižek argues further that the logic of concrete universality, outlined by Hegel, was misinterpreted by the late 19th century Hegelians, as they were "demanding the identification of each individual with his/her specific post within the defined and hierarchical Whole of the global [universal] social body" (Žižek 1999:94).

Žižek says that 'true' concrete universality is not a neutral medium for a particular content, as a kind of "mute universality" – something we all have in common (Žižek 1991:91), *i.e.,* cultural universals in anthropology. Universality in its actual existence has to be individuality (Žižek 1991:91). Actualization of universal is when the subject is "asserted as unique and irreducible to the particular concrete totality" (Žižek 1991:91), and this can only happen through 'active intervention': "Substance is praxis, active intervention; while Subject is theoria, passive intuition" (Žižek 1991:91). In this sense, 'true concrete' universality is not an 'expression' of a pre-existent abstract universality, but a 'performative' actualization of concrete universality through a constitutive 'event.'[10]

Žižek further illustrates this in his reference to the difference between Greek *Reminiscence* and Christian *Repetition* (Žižek 1999:212). This opposition originally commented by Kierkegaard: Socratic philosophical principle of the reminiscence is the idea that truth/knowledge is huddled in us, and we to rediscover it, as the inscription in Delphi reads: *know thyself;* and Christian idea

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[10] To exemplify the 'true' concrete universality, Žižek implicitly refers to the paradigm of 'performative', which Judith Butler, philosopher and gender theorist, develops in her books *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), in which she challenges the conventional notions of gender. According to Butler, 'performativity' is understood "not as the act by which a subject brings into being … but, rather, as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (Butler 1993:2). Her point is that gender is a dynamic notion, sequence of acts, not something ascribed (Butler 1990:25). In this case 'gender' represents the 'true' concrete universal. As "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results" (Butler 1990:25). Expressionist model represents the realization of imagined and pre-existing abstract universality. What Butler argues for is the contrary, that gender is constituted through a 'performance' in a particular moment.

of revelation where truth/knowledge is not inherent but imposed in the moment (Žižek 1999:212).

In *Repetition* there is some kind of abrupt action, assertion which Žižek calls the 'Event', "something violently imposed on me from the Outside" (Žižek 1999:212), that constitutes universality at one particular moment—in this sense, universality is not 'expression' of some preexisting universality, but is constituted 'performatively' in the moment (contrary to the rediscovery of *Reminisance*). Žižek emphasizes this moment, the Event, which is necessity for emergence of the 'true' concrete universal. It is like the moment of negation of all particular content: it has to emerge in order for universality to become truly universal. At the same time, that moment is the one preventing actualization to happen. Therein lays the 'gap'. It has to be renegotiated and reconstituted again in other situations, with different constellation of actors and interests.

2.3.1. Attaining Universality through the Particular

Žižek approaches concrete universality further from the perspective of the particular. For Žižek, true concrete universality can be attained only through the particular in the form of a "constitutive exception", which is the central notion in which universality should be grounded (Žižek 1999:99). To achieve this, it is necessary to identify "universality with the point of exclusion" (Žižek 1999:224). This can be achieved in practice, for example, through the solidarity with the exploited and the excluded. Here, Žižek uses two different examples from the former East Germany, or GDR[11] (Žižek 1999:189): the immigrant workers, and the Albanian and Bosnian Muslims (Žižek 1999:224). The minorities are in this case the particular; they fulfill the notion of Žižek's 'constitutive exception'. They are excluded from the 'culture' or 'nation' which is considered as a Whole. The true concrete universality that transcends both particular hegemonic interests and the empty abstract universality is thus achieved through the particular

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[11] Former East Germany, formally: German Democratic Republic.

exception, not as some particular predetermined essence, but as a political struggle. Concrete universal is therefore only established through particular (as difference), which becomes the inherent element of the universal. I understand Žižek's particularity, or 'exclusion,' as a center and not margins of politics.

This can also be applied to anthropology. For example, in anthropology of globalization and the human rights, human rights cannot be seen as a fixed 'expressive' model that has to be followed blindly, but as antagonistic process which should include a ('performative') dialogue with the excluded social groups.

An important question in this regard is how exactly are these politics different or similar from the commonly understood politics of human rights? I consider this question in the third part of this essay (see below).

There is an important difference established here between anthropological or scientific universalism advocated above by Geertz and political or human rights universalism, as discussed here in relation to Žižek's theories. Geertz's aim in this regard is scientific knowledge production: to understand the human through the perspective of the universal while Žižek, is more concerned with the political usefulness of the concrete universality in the reconciliation between universal (human rights) and the particular (minorities, the excluded).

3. Part II

In this second part of the essay, I continue with the discussion of the idea of cultural relativism, and its related concept of culture. In this relation, I also critically examine the terms such as identity politics, multiculturalism and essentialism[12][iii]. My goal is to analyze these concepts from the perspective of the binary bind between cultural relativism and universalism. In this way, I expose the limitations of cultural relativism and at the same time reveal scholarly and political potentials of the universalist approach.

In the next section, I examine how theoretical framework within which the concept of cultural relativism operates: particularly the notion of culture and cultural difference, approached through a theoretical and historical perspective.

3.1. Culture, Difference, and the Way Cultural Relativism Idea has Developed

The concept of cultural relativism is connected with tolerance and respect for cultural difference. However, before I address both of these concepts, I first examine the concept of culture through historical and theoretical perspective, and then relate it to cultural relativism.

In the enlightenment period, Comte and Spencer were accountable for establishing social sciences as positivistic[13], since knowledge was exclusively based on the empirical and systematic approach to the observed data[iv]. Social theories as scientific endeavors in the positivistic sense start to develop through "taking into account an awareness of deep cultural differences dividing

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[12] By definition, essentialism is "the practice of regarding something (as a presumed human trait) as having innate existence or universal validity rather than as being a social, ideological, or intellectual construct."

[13] Positivism is by Comte understood as empirical, and scientific approach: "Doctrine associated with Comte who adopted the term 'positive' to convey six features of things: being real, useful, certain, precise, organic, relative. He used it of his philosophy, which insisted on applying the scientific attitude not only to the sciences but also to human affairs" (Proudfoot and Lacey 2010:311).

humanity" (Eriksen 2001:10). The result is Enlightenment era's concept of man - an 'animal seeking culture'- which provokes essentializing concepts of the culture (Geertz 1973:35).

As related, social evolutionary perceptions, those of Sir Edward B. Tylor and Lewis Henry Morgan above all, dominated early anthropology. Their ideas are exemplified in their books *Primitive Culture* (Tylor 1871) and *Ancient Society* (Morgan 1877). For a long time, in the history of anthropology, scholars viewed 'cultures' as unified and isolated wholes. Sir Edward B. Taylor, provided his famous definition of culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor 1871)[v].

To this equation, Morgan added the idea of cultural evolutionism –through which he suggested that all cultures continuously develop from simple to complex social and cultural forms. Morgan assumed that human society had evolved through a series of stages, which he called savagery, barbarism, and civilization (Kottak 2011:294).

Consequence of these theories reflects an emphasis in which Europe is seen as the most civilized, and all the other cultures as being lower on the hierarchical ladder of 'evolution'. This theory goes side by side with *unilinear* evolution, the view that all cultures will always develop alongside the same patterns that take place along the same line everywhere in the world. However, what these scholars missed out, was differences and contradictions that exist within these 'wholes', and at the same time, the connections and mutual influences that exist between cultures.

Cultural relativism develops later with Boas and others as a direct opposition to the idea of culture as understood by social evolutionists. Cultural relativists reacted in this way to the racism and chauvinism implied in social evolutionism.

Franz Boas, an American scholar with European heritage, was at the forefront of this new development. Boas' central idea, which effectively opposed evolutionism, chauvinism, and biological and racial determinism, being very strong at the time, was historical particularism. Boas claimed in this regard that particular persons and cultures exhibit distinctive cultural characteristics and habits which should be assessed in their own right. Boas' argues that

individual cultures have to be studied in relation to their own histories, and not as points on the evolutionary ladder (Kottak 2011:296). For evolutionists, each culture was seen as a stage in evolution, while Boas considered culture as relatively independent entity. On the basis of Boas' arguments, 'culture' becomes central concept in anthropology, with which it displaces earlier focus on race, seen through evolutionist perspective: "the behavior of an individual is therefore determined not by his racial affiliation, but by the character of his ancestry and his cultural environment" (Boas 1945:27). Moreover, culture becomes the main factor which shapes social life and helps explain the differences between the people (Kottak 2011:296). Boas' new way of looking at culture led to a new approach of studying human diversity, namely, cultural relativism.

Meanwhile in Europe, more precisely in France and Britain, anthropologists form a new school of anthropology: structural anthropology (Eriksen 2001:19). Structuralism's most prominent scholar, Claude Levi-Strauss starts viewing culture as a system, constituted through structural relations among its elements. According to his theories, universal patterns existing within cultural systems are the products of the unchanging structure of the human mind. Hence, universal structures exist within all cultures (Kottak 2011:302). Unlike historical particularism, the school of structural anthropology was leaning more toward universalism than relativism. They also viewed systems as static wholes.

Closer to the Boasian legacy of particularism and relativism are symbolism and interpretive anthropology which develop in the second part of 20th century. Symbolism is a branch of anthropology created in reaction to structuralism. The most simple definition of this school can be stated as "the study of symbols in their social and cultural context" (Kottak 2011:302). The main critique in this regard was that structuralists focus on 'structure' and patterns whereas symbolists search for meanings. Structuralists focus on cross cultural comparison and universal interpretation, while symbolist find interest in particular cultures – they move from studying general laws, to the examination of human experience (Abu-Lughod 1991:474). Furthermore, structuralists see actions as separate form actors, while the symbolic anthropologists consider actions as governed by specific actor (Geertz 1973:14). In other words, symbolists refocus from system to individuals. Following Max Webber, Clifford Geertz popularized the concept of interpretative sciences. He rejects structuralism in the following terms: "[analysis of culture] is

not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (Geertz 1973:14).

Another reason for the rejection of previous theories by symbolic and interpretive anthropology resulted from methodological differences. The participant-observation method becomes the central anthropological method, which focuses on particular cultures. Participant–observation is a field method that contributes to a more sensitive cultural relativist and particularistic approach. It enables the researcher to experience cultures first-hand, from close, through direct observation.

3.1.1. Culture and Difference

Building on this historical background, and using Abu-Lughod's commentary, I analyze how cultural relativism operates within the notions of culture and difference.

One of the most prominent commentaries on the topic is Lila Abu-Lughod's *Writing against Culture* (1991)[14]. Abu-Lughod makes three main arguments in her critique of 'cultural feminists'[15] and 'reverse-Orientalists'[16] seen as actors essentializing culture and their identity:
Her first argument lies in the fact that they "overlook the connections between those on each side of the divide, and the ways in which they define each other" (Abu-Lughod 1991:471). By doing so, Abu-Lughod argues, they re-assert essentialism first pointed against them by the dominant society. This is exemplified in man/woman, or in Occident/Orient dichotomy.

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[14] In the title *Writingagainst Culture* (1991) Abu-Lughod is reacting tothe title of an influential anthropological book at the time *Writing Culture* (Marcel and Clifford 1986).

[15] In her texts, Abu-Lughod mentions some cultural feminists she is criticizing: Gilligan (1982), Belenkyet (1986), Chodorow (1978), Hartsock (1985), and Ruddick (1980) and others (Abu-Lughod 1991:471).

[16] Abu-Lughod defines 'reverse-Orientalism' as an act of re-valorization of the attributes which were devaluated by the dominant system in their attitudes toward Oriental 'others'. Author gives an example of a greater emphasis in belief in god in the Islam as a counter measurement to the immorality and profanity of the Westerners (Abu-Lughod 1991:470).

Second argument refers to internal cultural difference: "They overlook differences within each category constructed by the dividing practices, differences like those of class, race, and sexuality … but also ethnic origin, personal experience, age, mode of livelihood, health, living situation (rural or urban), and historical experience"(Abu-Lughod 1991:471). Author argues that they "over-emphasize coherence" (Abu-Lughod 1991:471), and ignore the differences within the group.

In her third argument, Abu-Lughod says that "they ignore the ways in which experiences have been constructed historically and have changed over time. Both cultural feminism and revivalist movements tend to rely on notions of authenticity and the return to positive values not represented by the dominant other" (Abu-Lughod 1991:471). Author criticizes the ignorance of the historical construction of culture and its development over time, and marks their re-valorization of authenticity.

What is prominent in Abu-Lughod's discussion of culture and difference is also her critique of the essentializing approach to culture, both on the side of scholars and observers (from the *etic* perspective), and on the side of insiders themselves (from the *emic* perspective). Abu-Lughod examines the seemingly contradictory notion of self-essentializing discourses that exist within cultural feminism and in India. Despite their anti-essentialist intent, instead to counter the 'othering' effect, they strengthen it by valorization of the modes of differences (Abu-Lughod 1991:470,471).

Her main point in this regard is that both of them view and represent 'culture' as something fixed and 'essential'. Abu-Lughod, however, also recognizes that this kind of 'cultural feminism,' and 'reverse- Orientalism', can be useful political tools for these communities "in forging a sense of unity and in waging struggles of empowerment" (Abu-Lughod 1991:471).

Furthermore, this kind of essentialist approach to culture also creates and reinforces the boundaries between cultures, overlooks their connections, and creates hierarchies between them. She points out the following: "I will argue that 'culture' operates in anthropological discourse to enforce separations that inevitably carry a sense of hierarchy" (Abu-Lughod, 1991:466)

One of the main reasons for this essentialist concept of culture comes from the pioneering anthropologists who were working under the banner of imperialism. The dichotomy in question is a historically constructed product of colonialism, when the West needed to construct non-Western people and cultures as inferior 'others,' in order to justify their exploitation (cf. Said

1978, Abu-Lughod 1991:470,472). A consequence of evolutionary perceptions that projected the Orient as 'barbaric' and 'non-civilized' resulted consequently in Europeans being able to perceive themselves in contrast as 'civilized'. This is why Abu-Lughod named her essay metaphorically *Writing against Culture,* calling us to challenge this essentialized and harmful notion of 'culture' as something fixed and essentially different.

Abu-Lughod also offers measures to counter this problem; she promotes the writing of "ethnographies of the particular" with the goal of countering potential "othering" effect of the concept of culture among anthropologists (Abu-Lughod 1991:473). In her view, ethnographies of the particular are the most suitable in presenting the contradictions and complexities of cultures as they are enacted on a daily basis. Thus, "writing against culture" is writing against a common way of presenting and analyzing culture as something static, homogenous, and independent.

3.2. Cultural Relativism's Political and Intellectual Descendants

I discuss here two of the cultural relativism's 'intellectual descendants'[17]: identity politics and multiculturalism. I consider these concepts because they offer practical examples to present the abstract and general relationship between universalism and cultural relativism. I also explain, through the lenses of cultural relativism, the main dilemmas related to these terms.

Unlike the previous part of the text, where I write about the theoretical schools and scholarly debates about relativism and universalism, I change the focus here to the question of the relationship between national and international political systems and between individuals and group. Therefore, the role of identity is going to take a significant part in the discussion.

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[17]According to Dr. Edward Younkins: "multiculturalism, racism, postmodernism, deconstructionism, political correctness, and social engineering are among cultural relativism's 'intellectual descendants'" (Younkins 2000).

Furthermore, I present identity politics from the 'inside' perspective, or how minority groups relate to the state and society, while multiculturalism, seen from the 'outside' perspective, tells a story about how the state deals from 'outside' with minority groups and with cultural diversity existing within a society. Before that, I briefly discuss the concept of 'essentialism', which is integral part of both identity politics and multiculturalism.

In essentialism any specific entity is considered as having a fixed set of attributes that determine its identity and function which represents its so-called true nature. The concept of essentialism is constitutive part of totalizing ideologies such as nationalism, Nazism, racism, and biological determinism, to mention a few. Closely related to essentialism are reification and literalism as forms and variations of reductionism (Barnard and Spencer 1996:188). Essentialists reduce identities and social phenomena to most general and basic forms, which results in stereotyping. Seemingly, essentialism opposes relativism, but is actually often also its constitutive part. According to Kottak, "essentialism describes the process of viewing an identity as established, real, and frozen, to hide the historical processes and politics within which that identity developed" (Kottak 2011:593).

Another characteristic of essentialism is that - in the making of identities – through it, things are taken as *a priori*, or 'God given'. In this way, they do not take into account historical contingency. Thus, one of the problems with essentialism is its negation of the change in people or society.

I present this in Geertz's opinion on essentialism, as discussed by Barnard and Spencer (1996): "In Geertz's (…) influential study of nationalism, for example essentialism appears in tandem with 'epochalism' as a defining characteristic of nationalism, and especially as the conflationary notion of 'national character' grounded in such shared symbolic substances as blood. In this sense, epochalism – a modernist Zeitgeist – is temporarily the antithesis but also the corollary of essentialism, which requires the construction of a set of age-old national traditions through which national origins are effectively placed beyond real time altogether" (1996:189). Here, Geertz confirms aforementioned *a priori* feature of essentialism: he emphasizes an importance of essentialist position in relation to ideology of nationalism. In this sense, factors which characterizes nationalism the most is a suppression of the particular (*i.e.*, minorities, or the local).

3.2.1. Identity Politics

In continuation, I examine the relationship between relativism and universalism from the political perspective. I discuss the notion of identity politics and its paradox as related to the essentialised notions that these kinds of politics produce. This paradox is an outcome of the use of essentialized notion of identity as a basis for the political struggle of particular social groups, usually the minorities, or the dominated social groups.

George Herber Mead states that: "The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process" (Eriksen 2001:40). We are social and cultural beings, nurtured trough enculturation - the process of acquiring one's culture. Our identities are fluid and multiple (Kottak 2011:593). We usually identify ourselves through our sex or sexual preference, ethnicity, nation, region, religion, etc.

The 'identity politics' is yet another overloaded term that I explain in this text. Identity politics represent theory and political practice that stems from the experience of injustice or exclusion, marginalization, or segregation, shared among the members of a certain social group[vi]. Thomas Hylland Eriksen describes identity politics as a *glocal* phenomenon, *i.e.*, as the blend of global and local (Eriksen 2001:291). Identity politics are politics usually conducted from within the culture or society. The identity politics' goal is to enable political freedom of a specific constituency, usually a minority group, marginalized within its larger context – usually the state[vii]. In other words, identity politics are "confined to a territory and a particular in-group, yet they depend on a global discourse about culture and rights in order to succeed" (Eriksen 2001:291).

A tricky part is that identity politics, despite their seemingly anti-essentialist intent, often use essentialists strategies. For example, sometimes marginalized minority group reasserts same logic of essentialism used previously by majority group to dominate them. They use it in their struggle for self-determination, asserting their particular socio-political or cultural rights. This is similar to what Lila Abu-Lughod was saying in her *Writing Against Culture*. Her point was that

some notion of fixed identity, as it is used in a political context, is created in opposition, or negative relation, to some other group. Minorities (and the colonized social groups) often use fixed notions of identity in this regard, as reclaimed and appropriated from the dominant society. Abu-Lughod provides an example of "Gandhian appeal to the greater spirituality of a Hindu India, compared with the materialism and violence of the West" (Abu-Lughod 1991:470). She calls these phenomena 'reverse essentialism' and self-Orientalization in the context of Orientalist discourse (Abu-Lughod 1991:470). This kind of tactic is also named "strategic essentialism" by Gayatry Chakravory Spivak[viii].

For a better understanding of identity politics, and its possible political consequences, the case of former Yugoslavia is illustrative:

"In the former republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) you can be everything but – Yugoslavian"[ix]. Today, everybody in the former Yugoslavian republics gets stigmatized by his or her nationality and religion. Yugoslavism through 'brotherhood and unity' represented the idea which exceeds nationalism, and combats its essentialist logic. Yugoslavian project endeavored to transcend particularistic politics through some kind of 'universalism' (federalism). A useful example of the risks of identity politics can be seen in the dynamic that led to the dismembering of the socialist Yugoslav federation in 1991. During the previous years, through mechanisms established by the 1974 Constitution and via the decentralized structure of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, political elites in the country behaved as the representatives of republics which to a certain extent were supposed to represent national groups[18]. The particular case of a very multicultural Bosnia and Herzegovina, in general republican autonomy in terms of culture, education and economic administration, was part of a greater frame of regulation of national conflict, in which identity politics (in the form of ethnic exclusivism) were perceived by the Yugoslav government as a main threat to Yugoslavian state and its project of 'brotherhood and unity.' Some of the major conflicts of the time, such as the highway conflict with Slovenia in 1969, and the mass populist movement that came to be known as the *Croatian Spring* in the early 1970s, can be thus interpreted as a result of this structure of

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[18]Kottak refers to national group/nationality: "Ethnic groups that once had, or wish to have or regain, autonomous political status (their own country) are called nationalities" (Kottak 2011:347).

political and national representation in which Yugoslavism, as an all-encompassing identity, became weaker and weaker.

However, it would only be in the 1980s, after the death of Josip Broz Tito, and in the midst of a generalized financial and economic crisis that the identity politics exploded, unleashing a spiraling dynamic of national tensions, especially between the republics of Slovenia and Serbia, where political elites developed strong links with nationalist movements in order to reinforce their bargaining position at the federal level. By the end of the 1980s, Slovenian, Serbian and Croatian[19] national elites had concluded that the political agreement represented by the last Yugoslav Constitution was leading nowhere and that Yugoslavia as a federation was no longer viable. Hence, in the context of global and regional transformation of the early 1990s, nationalistic identity politics would go from being a mere mechanism of political and economic regulation in a multinational state to becoming a foundation of new Southeastern European national states that came out of the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Cohen 1995, Eriksen 2001).

From the last two centuries, we have learned hard lessons on nationalism, and, in the twenty first century, we are supposed to learn from our mistakes: that actions based on essentialism and identity politics rarely lead to a more just and free world. In reaction to the essentialism of identity politics, some authors advocate for anti-essentialist approaches: "If the modern 'problem of identity' is how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the postmodern 'problem of identity' is primarily to avoid fixation and keep the options open" (*cf.* Bauman, in Eriksen 2001:143); however, there also exist valid critiques of anti-essentialism, and suggestions for anti-anti essentialist approach, for example, in Gilroy 1993). We need to consider culture *vis-à-vis* cultural identities as fluid and porous, for the sake of avoiding political and moral errors we have made in the past.

I presented here how identity politics worked in the context of former Yugoslavia. I conclude in somewhat radical manner that these politics can lead to war and genocide. On the other hand, I find it important to recognize and remind that identity politics, beside their limitations (use of essentialist notions and exclusivism), can also often be seen as useful tools for minority groups in their struggles for their political rights and for their cultural empowerment.

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[19]All of the Yugoslav republics were making some kind of exclusivist claims, some more magnified than others.

3.2.2. Multiculturalism

Similar to my discussion of identity politics, which I understand as a political aspect of cultural relativism and universalism, is also an ambiguous notion of multiculturalism, which I also regard as one of the practical political applications of cultural relativism.

After the World War II, with the advancement of intense globalization, globalization of capitalism, modern state, technology, communication and accessibility to information, anthropologists stared explaining 'cultures' as linked, intertwined and changing. In the third millennium, prospects for ethnicity and uniform cultures are uncertain, but we are also witnessing growing importance of the cultural identities. On one side, homogenizing factor of nationalism does not allow enough space for those 'smaller' cultural/ethnic identities.[20] While on the other side, highly industrialized, multiethnic states must forge purely civic (i.e. non-ethnically based) national identities, if they are to be called true democracies (*cf*. Hayden 1996).

In the midst of the today's convulsed state of political affairs in the world, multicultural view is the one which opposes essentialist, assimilationist and exclusivist models of the nation – nationalism and racism.[21]

The multiculturalists' main idea is that of tolerance and equal values among all cultures together with the belief that there are no general truths, norms or values pertaining to some 'universal' standard. As we saw in the beginning of this essay, cultural relativists share the same ideas of tolerance, egalitarian view of cultures, and opposition to universality. It can be said that multiculturalism is a political version of the cultural relativism applied by the state and the general society. In continuation, I question character of multiculturalism. Does it represent a universalist approach to cultural relativism? Or is it particularistic? Or it is some combination of the two?

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[20] Nationalism not, but capitalism is particularly flexible to incorporate cultural difference.

[21] In Kottak's book racism is "the belief that a perceived racial difference is a sufficient reason to value one person less than another" (Kotakk 2011:357).

Surprisingly, anthropologists are reluctant when it comes to a discussion about multiculturalism. One of the reasons is that multiculturalists often use 19th century concept of culture as their starting point, which is rejected by most anthropologists today.

Unfortunately, multicultural approach bears certain shortcomings, and I present them through two authors whose ideologies stand on the opposite poles in the political spectrum. One of them is Slavoj Žižek, who I have already mentioned in this essay, and the other is free market oriented Dr. Edward W. Younkins.

In his article "Why the World is the Way It Is: Cultural Relativism and Its Descendents" (Younkins 2000) Younkins points out that, beside the tolerant spirit of multiculturalism towards cultural diversity, there is one worldview which multiculturalists have excluded from equal values among all cultures, namely Eurocentric Western view. His main claim is that multiculturalists discharge importance of the Western perspective because it bears traditions of elitism, sexism and racism based on privileges of the dead white males (Younkins 2000). Author blames multiculturalists for double standards in this regard.

Younkins also adds that multiculturalists imply that the notion of multiple 'cultures'[22] holds a strong influence on our way of thinking and seeing the world around us, and on our beliefs that teach person is a representative of his or her 'culture'. Every group has its own standard of right and wrong. And "it is therefore impossible to discuss, argue, or judge any one group's truth as better" (Younkins 2000). As a result, he or she is bound to be in compliance with its own 'culture' in order to escape exclusion from it. Younkins argues: "Multiculturalism thus destroys an individual's confidence in his own mind—this occurs when a person allows his group to tell him what to believe" (Younkins 2000).[23]

This objection is valid, only if the very idea of multiculturalism is based on the concept of culture from the 19th century I have discussed before – culture viewed as fixed, isolated, and

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[22] Race, ethnicity, and sex or sexual preference in this context.

[23]Younkins adds that "for the multiculturalist, truth only exists by consensus within each biologically defined group" (Younkins 2000). Author takes for granted here that the notion of culture (either as race, ethnicity, or sexual preference) is 'biologically defined.' This is contrary to anthropologists' views, who see cultures as social constructs.

homogeneous entity. Out of this, Younkins concludes that multiculturalism is anti-individualistic concept as it limits individual's options to those held by his or her cultural group. In his essentialist view, multiculturalists tend to have this binary perspective that an individual's worldview or 'culture' is either a construct of his or her identity group, or he or she is an outsider spoiled by the Western logic: "multiculturalists assign each rational and autonomous individual into a group based on the group's specific, absolute, and nondebatable dissemblances from other groups" (Younkins 2000).

About the multiculturalism, which evokes the ideas such as tolerance and peaceful coexistence among most of people, Younkins makes forcible arguments, accusing multiculturalists for being anti-Western, anti-individualist or collectivist, and essentialising. As such, multiculturalists want to change culturally assimilated societies (*i.e.* The United States of America) to unassimilated (multicultural societies).

Based on these claims, he finishes his argument with saying that "multiculturalists fail to see that the diversity methods they use to find and create diversity will, in fact, divide the country[24]. The result will be a widespread, societal tendency toward hatred, revenge, or belief in the innate superiority of one's group and a feeling of solidarity and self-righteousness" (Younkins 2000).

Slavoj Žižek talks about multiculturalism in several of his books, but his most basic insights about the topic are succinctly presented in his interview about one of his latest books, called *On Violence* (2008)[x]. In this interview, Žižek is critical of liberal multiculturalists, and their assumptions. Žižek argues that it is not enough to say that we live in different 'cultures'[25] and that we need some neutral (universal) legal space to regulate how we should tolerate each other, because simply, it does not work that way.

He gives the example of Martin Luther King, saying that he was not fighting for the 'tolerance' toward of African-American people, but for their legal and economic rights. A problem is that

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[24]Younkins is speaking about the United States of America here.

[25] Because I am still talking about the multiculturalism, term 'culture' is rather defined by biological character, meaning that it represents ethnicities, races, sexes, sexual preferences etc.

we live in a post-political[26] society (Žižek 1999:198), where all the conflicts are politically neutralized; conflicts are no longer presumed as political or economic, but restated as cultural. Žižek adds that, in this case, if conflicts have become cultural, all we can do is to 'tolerate'.

Moreover, Žižek argues against the multiculturalists' motto which states that one has to understand the 'other' in order to have an open discussion. Žižek raises a question on how different 'cultures', for example Arabs, Indians and Latinos, who live in the same 'block', can be decent and respectful to each other without this multiculturalists 'all-encompassing understanding' of each other? In his view, it is not up to these individuals to get along, but up to the state and other authorities and institutions to solve the problem structurally, through laws and regulations.

The point is that 'tolerance' and 'understanding' are insufficient to solve the problems of racism, sexism, and economic inequality. Žižek offers the way to counter these problems by focusing on solving material or structural inequality, and the power differentials that emerge from it[xi]. From this perspective, if we want to deal with such global issues, we need to develop some kind of universal language and approach. In order to achieve this universalism, we need to follow the guidelines outlined in the discussion about 'true' concrete universality. The point is that one or more abstract 'universal' legal codes will lead us nowhere, but if we consider 'performative' never-ending reconciliation of particular political struggles within the universal sphere, Žižek believes these problems can be solved to some extent. Moreover, for Žižek, multiculturalism serve as an excuse to emphasize problems of secondary nature, while displacing the real problem - that of the struggle for global social and economic equality, as related to global capitalism.

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[26] Term 'post-politics' stands for state of affairs where political values are replaced by moral ones.

4. Part III. Human Rights

In the next chapter, I examine the conceptual framework within which the notion of universalism operates. I focus on the dialectic relationship between human rights on one side, and cultural relativism on the other, as approached from a theoretical perspective, while considering also its practical applications. Furthermore, I analyze some of the problems of the human rights concept in relation to culture, as it is understood by the representatives of multiculturalism, and critiqued by cultural relativists.

4.1. Vicissitudes of Human Rights

Human rights are the "rights based on justice and morality beyond and superior to particular countries, cultures, and religions" (Kottak 2011:39). Human rights pertain to individual rights, while they are globally applicable. In addition, human rights relate to every human being equally, regardless of time and space, or history and culture, and. because of that, they are 'universal'.

Almost all of the internationally recognized human rights are included in the United Nations' documents: the United Nations Charter; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Kottak 2011:39).

Besides human rights, there are also cultural rights – the "rights vested in religious and ethnic minorities and indigenous societies" (Kottak 2011:39); and, last but not least, there exist intellectual property rights – the rights of "an indigenous group's collective knowledge and its applications" (Kottak 2011:39). There are lots of criticisms and philosophical debates about the universality of human rights, especially when it comes to a decision on what to do when cultural (*i.e.*, group) rights do not comply with human (*i.e.*, individual) rights (Kottak 2011:42). The

scope of the discussion on this topic is too broad to be covered in this essay, and, because of this, I am discussing only 'individual' human rights.

Nowadays, we can certainly claim that there is no imaginable topic in terms of the concept of human rights that would not turn out at first as problematic. Even the genealogy of the idea of human rights by itself supports this hypothesis. The origin of the concept is a problem in itself[27]: whether it primarily belongs to moral, ethical, legal or political category.

Human rights discourse is both uncritically adopted and harshly criticized by a variety of political, civic and social actors, be it left, right or center. On one side there are human rights activists who support universalism and see culture as homogenous and unchanging, and as such an obstacle to achieving these rights for everyone (Merry 2003:43). On the other side, there are anthropologists who argue that culture does not present and obstacle to universal human rights, because it is ever-changing and as such can and should be an important part when considering human rights (Barnard and Spencer 2010:483). This poses a problem in abridging the issues regarding the relation universal human rights *vs.* culture, and thus the inability to improve and apply human rights measures, as well as the quality of life worldwide.

I do not believe that this problem is without a solution that can satisfy all sides of the spectrum. However, this very antagonism between relativism and universalism can lead to results in the emancipating potential for the human rights discourse.

To analyze this topic, I am examining the articles written by two contemporary anthropologists: Sally Engle Merry and Kirsten Hastrup, both distinguished scholars in human rights discourse. Marry notes that the problem is in the misunderstanding of the concept of culture by human activists and journalists which leads to cultural relativism's image as an obstacle towards human rights. Hastrup discusses the inability of the legal language to capture the 'real' human experience, and thus to offer an adequate form of justice together with its compensation for the victims.

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[27] The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights was coined by the victors of the Second World War in 1948, and thus it "expressed a particularly Euro-American vision of what it meant to be human" (Barnard and Spencer 2010:361). Furthermore, the American Anthropological Association warned about its disregard toward the "cultural particularities" (Barnard and Spencer 2010:361).

4.1.1. The Common Misunderstandings of the Concept of 'Culture' and Its Consequences for Human Rights

At the onset, it is important to state that universal human rights activists and relativists are not philosophically or morally opposed to each other. The dialogue between them is quite notable, but, again, the idea of cultural relativism is anathema to many human rights activists. One of the reasons is that cultural relativists (as it has been repeatedly said in this essay) treat all cultural perspectives as equally valuable. They argue for tolerance of practices from different cultures, which sometimes stand at odds with the human rights as depicted in the original UN charter. Moreover, the relativistic caution that human rights are rooted in the Western civilization and that even though they are commonly accepted in Europe or North America does not mean that they are standards in some other parts of the world. However, the biggest disagreement between human rights activist and anthropologist is the very concept and definition of culture. While the first see culture as a whole, subject to generalizations and unchanging, meaning that they have an essentialist view of the culture, while the latter see it as a dynamic and ever-changing.

In her text *Human Rights Law and the Demonization of Culture* (2003) Sally Engle Merry writes about common misconceptions that human rights activists, lawyers and journalist have about anthropologists and their involvement with human rights issues regarding the incident that happened in Pakistan at the time.

Namely, there was a gang-rape of a young Pakistani girl which was authorized by the local tribal council (Merry 2003:42). A journalist contacted Merry, presuming that her allegiances stand with morally defined cultural relativists. In this case, the journalist in question was expecting that Merry will defend local practices of the Pakistani tribe council. Instead, Merry condemned the act, saying that it does not represent the Pakistani society, that it has more to do with local political and class struggles (Merry 2003:43). Merry draws a parallel with United States for a better understanding, where a particular wrongdoing, such as a company tax fraud, should not be regarded as a representation of a homogeneous United States 'culture.'

The resulting frustration for the journalist, except for the obvious fact that Merry did not condone rape in any form, was journalist's misinterpretation of culture as a homogenous entity, and not a

heterogeneous social constellation that allows for differences, especially in a country and a culture as big and complicated as Pakistan. This explains that the journalist, as well as many other human right activists and even some anthropologists[28], have a misconception that anthropologists and cultural relativists reject the idea of having their own political and moral judgments. Merry argues that there is a fundamental misinterpretation of cultural relativism, where human rights lawyers, journalists and activist misinterpret the concept of culture itself. They fail to see that in the 21st century, most anthropologists reject the 19th century concept of culture, but regard 'culture' in a more anti-essentialist, dynamic, and hybrid way (Merry 2003:43). Consequently, cultural relativism appears misguided if such a concept of 'culture' is used when journalists or scholars address harmful practices from around the globe.

The second issue that Merry addresses in her article is the relationship between cultural relativism and human rights. The misunderstood concept of culture is again the main obstacle in this debate: "Where this conception [of culture] widely recognized within popular culture as well as among journalists and human-rights activists, it could shift the terms of the intractable debate between universalism and relativism. Instead, culture is increasingly understood as a barrier to the realization of human rights by activists and a tool for legitimizing noncompliance with human rights by conservatives" (Merry 2003:43). From this it follows that if the concept of culture would be properly understood: cultural relativism would not have to stand at odds with human rights.

Moreover, because of the misconception surrounding the concept of culture, anthropology is often ignored and seen as irrelevant by human rights activists, even when it could actually be beneficial in finding proper human rights solutions (Merry 2003:44). In Merry's view, anthropology itself should be central in these kinds of debates: "Adopting a more sophisticated and dynamic understanding of culture not only promotes human–rights activism, but also relocates anthropological theorizing to the center of these issues rather than to the margins, where it has been banished" (Merry 2003:44). One thing favoring the anthropology is that it is changing quite rapidly toward acceptance of human rights in a form that respects the cultural differences. To see this we need to mention the problem of 1947 AAA statement which was condemned by a law professor as "tolerance without limits" (Merry 2003:42) which paints moral

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[28] S. A. Merry gives the example of Karen Engle (2001)

cultural relativism as something anthropologist should be ashamed of. Current anthropology is arguably more advanced, but what is missing the most, as Merry notes in the quote above, is political engagement by anthropologists, which should be central for the discipline. Because of this lack of political activism, the public sees anthropologists as enablers of harmful practices, and not as protectors of human rights within particular cultures.

One of the most frequent examples of harmful practices used to depict the dilemma posed by cultural relativists is female genital mutilation (henceforth, FGM), which I have mentioned in the beginning of this essay. Female genital mutilation represents 'traditional' practices in some parts of Africa and the Middle East. These practices include *Clitoridectomy* (removal of the clitoris) and *Infibulation* (sewing of the vaginal lips – *labia)* (Kottak 2011:39).

When it comes to FGM, the issue at hand is that, on one side, human rights activists use a holistic (mis)understanding of culture: "Culture equals tradition and is juxtaposed to women's human rights to equality" (Marry 2003:43). On the other side, national elites of the countries where FGM is still practiced defend it in the name of culture and tradition in order to pursue their own political interests. However, both sides see the culture in the same essentialist manner, the only difference is that the Westerners often use it in a way that reveals their remaining colonial attitudes, and the latter to express their anti-colonial ones. This conflict creates a cross-cultural deadlock. This way of thinking only deepens the notion of cultural relativism as something negative, as an obstacle towards achieving human rights.

The essentialist notion of culture creates disdain for cultural relativism and a general loss of 'tolerance of difference': "As human-rights law demonizes culture, it misunderstands anthropology as well. The holistic conception of culture provides no space for change, contestation or the analysis of the links between the power, practice and values. Instead it becomes barrier to the reformist project of universal human rights. From the legal perspective of human rights, it is the texts, the documents and compliance that matter. Universalism is essential while relativism is bad. There is a sense of moral certainty which taking account of culture disrupts. This means, however, that normal principle of tolerance for difference is lost" (Merry 2003:43). The question that comes to mind is straightforward: how to reconcile cultural differences and universalism in relation to this case? On the one hand we should definitely prevent demonization of entire countries that condone FGM, which only leads to further

deepening of racism and colonialist attitudes from the West. On the other hand we should recognize, magnify and enable the voices of the people from these same countries that struggle within local communities in the effort to end such harmful practices and pursue the human rights discourse. However it should be done without a twinge of colonialist imposition of the Western values from afar which means little to the people involved in struggles against FGM.

Cultural relativism as understood by anthropologists, and universalism as seen by human rights activists are only opposed to each other if we view them through the lens of essentialist concept of culture. The conclusion is that they can work hand in hand if we understand the concept of culture properly. This can be possible only through conversation and political activism, as well as if both sides take some responsibility and get involved with each other in order to overcome these problems.

4.1.2. Instrumentalization of the language

One point which can be found in Merry's text that I have not discussed above is the instrumentalization of the language and law in human rights discourse. Where anthropology is descriptive and supposedly non-instrumental, human rights are the exact opposite of that. They are represented by the law, which has a concrete and instrumental function in this regard. Especially looking from a political perspective, the law is a tool that provides legal knowledge which is then used to solve human rights problems from the legal perspective. In the title of Merry's article "Human Rights Law and Demonization of Culture," she suggests that human rights law can negatively affect our conceptions of 'other' cultures. She seems to be referring specifically to the legal language human rights activist use and implications of that language on the concepts of culture. In general, in the sphere of cultural relativism, language is of great importance "since language is seen as a means of categorizing, and therefore constructing, experience, and actively shaping what counts as reality" (Barnard and Spencer 2010). This may be troublesome everlasting aspect for cultural relativists' description and human rights

instrumentalization, in the sense that language can prove to be insufficient to sufficiently 'capture' human experience.

Kirsten Hastrup, another prominent anthropologist in the field of human rights discusses this inability of legal language to capture the experience of suffering and violence, in her article *Violence, suffering and human rights* (2003).Author introduces the situation with the short, but poignant story about a horrific incident, which occurred in Surinam in the 1990s:

A group of Surinam solders met twenty unarmed Maroons, and supposedly, under the suspicion that they are associates with guerilla 'jungle commandos', they beat them up heavily, cut them, and urinated on them. They released some of them, but they kept others in captivity (one of them was fifteen year old child), drove them away, made them dig their own graves, and shot them dead. One did not die immediately, and stayed alive, only long enough to tell this story (Hastrup 2003:310).

This 'incident' went to the court (Inter-American Court of Human Rights) against the Surinam state. After the trial, Surinamese government accepted the responsibility of those soldiers, and the case was closed.

Consequently, the state wanted to compensate the victims and their families (Hastrup 2003:311), but they had a problem with exactly who should be compensated as a part of that family. Namely, in the victims' village, they did not have the Western concept of a family - for them, the family represented more than a group of close blood relatives, and in that sense a wider social alliance. What the court ended up deciding, with a help of some anthropologists, is that the whole village should be regarded as one big family. They compensated the victims and their heirs with the entitlement to school fees for children, and school and medical dispensary were given to the community, as a compensation for the loss of the individual lives and the suffering of all of the involved (Hastrup 2003:311). According to Hastrup, this was a problem, since it "possibly continues an obsolete (if well meaning) image of the 'Others' that we are bound to call into doubt in this era of methodological individualism and (inter-) subjectivities" (Hastrup 2003:312). What the author suggests is that Westerners once again essentialized the 'other' culture, and made it seem more homogeneous and exotic as it was in reality, while at the same time, they neglected the experiences of individuals and the role of difference in that society.

Unfortunately, this tragedy concerning Maroons in Surinam represents a common occurrence from all over the world.

This act of compensation or reparation is one which interests Hastrup the most. How does one calculate somebody's humiliation, suffering and life? Even more, how does one define terms such as suffering and violence?

Hastrup says that in perceiving 'violence' and, all the more, the concept of 'suffering,' there exists a problem of representation and definition of human experience, "suffering not only escapes definition, it also defies objective measurement by belonging so intimately to the subjective domain" (Hastrup 2003:310).

Hastrup investigates the way how to deal with these issues. One common answer to the problem is instrumentalization of international human rights and their laws (legal and ethical) upon which societies can measure their human rights record. Hastrup contemplates to what extent can this be helpful? And if the anthropologists can contribute to this resolving these issues? Can anthropology and human rights work together?

This is a troublesome issue where Hastrup doubts anthropologists to undertake a quest to convert an enormous 'bundle' of political and moral problems and reduce it into a fixed package of legal logistics (Hastrup 2003:312). Such a 'bundle' represents all the moral and physical terrors of victimized Maroons, and accordingly poses a challenge of how to deal with them properly in the sphere of the legal language, which is alien to the Maroon society. The Maroons are in this case represented as the 'Others', who the human rights representatives do not know much about, and therefore they cannot sufficiently represent them. Furthermore, the reparation was decided according to the western law, by the western lawyers. It is not apparent in the Hastrup's article, but it seems that the reparation supposedly did not take into account the plights of the victims and their family members.

I already said that violence and suffering cannot be properly represented from the legal perspective. In my opinion it is similar as with notion of culture[xii], except that suffering is perhaps even one step farther away from representation, because of if its 'silence' (Hastrup 2003:309). Hastrup advocates for these kinds of 'disorders' (*i.e.*, suffering, violence, which are

usually regarded as 'exceptions' to the 'order' of culture) should be included into the concept of 'culture'.

The biggest inconsistency which characterizes the process of representing local culture and its implicit morality through foreign international law and its explicit universalized norms is in a somewhat forced appropriation of a particular culture by the law. Here, we stumble once again against the paradox of identity politics, as Hastrup argues: "by investing groups of people with particular collective rights, culture itself is (re-)essentialized, and the legitimate language for political struggle is twisted" (Hastrup 2003:317). Human rights are laws, and the law is power, represented through language, which means that "objectifying features of the language turn into fundamentalist notions of right and wrong" (Hastrup 2003:317). In other words, the law fixes and predetermines justice, and at the same time establishes binary notion of 'winners and losers' where there is complexity and contradiction (Hastrup 2003:317).

This represents a problem of instrumentalization, or institutionalization of particular (case of Surinam Maroons) in the sphere of the universal (human rights). Is it possible to make the real universal standard to which every human being can compare her or his actions while avoiding any type of 'imperialism'?

From the texts I have analyzed, the answer to the question is that it is improbable, but not impossible. The constant effort, and in the case of the human rights discourse, even greater involvement of the anthropologists *vis-à-vis* cultural relativists into the discussion and generation of the human rights might eventually lead us to better solutions. Not the final, static solution, but a better, more dynamic one. But the real answer to the question is greater inclusion of the 'local voices' to the debate: "Practicing toleration is to engage in conversation with those who are different, rather than to suppress their voice or avoid them altogether" (Hastrup 2003:315). Hastrup talks about 'dialogue' where Žižek talks about 'struggle', but both agree on "identifying universality with the point of exclusion" (Žižek 1999:224), where in Hastrup's commentary, 'local voices' stand for point of exclusion.

Discussing the universality of human rights in terms of conflicting roles between universalism and relativism,[29] Hastrup makes a point that human rights have to be universal in at least some sense, because if they are not applicable to all humans, the whole idea of human rights is pointless (Hastrup 2001).

This makes us think about the problem of the universal versus relative, and the ways to reconcile one with another. Each particular culture, as well as subjective feelings of suffering, ordeal and violence, is almost impossible to incorporate into an objective and universal discourse. Human rights should not be regarded as abstract universal, but as 'true' concrete universal. Human rights should not be fixed and predominated by neither the language nor the law; instead, they can only 'performatevely' emerge through the dialogue. We should demand acknowledgement of the cultural and subjective complexity and difference in its solutions. Moreover, we should acknowledge the 'split/gap' that will always exist in this regard, and try not to pretend that institutions and courts have the implicit power to resolve these issues.

The task of instrumentalization is additionally aggravated by the global system in which we live, because of the fact that human rights institutions have become tools for particular political struggles in various parts of the world (*cf.* Okić 2012).

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[29] For more information, see: Kirsten Hastrup: Human Rights on Common Ground: The Quest for Universality (2001)

5. Anti anti-relativism

At least since the 1980s, there has been a degree of backlash in the academic sphere towards the stance of cultural relativism, and anthropology as its main haven. Clifford Geertz notices this rise of the anti-relativist intent and he analyzes why this issue is raised at this particular time. As his beliefs lie somewhere between the cultural relativism and universalism, he does not defend the cultural relativism stance explicitly, instead, he counters the attack with his criticism on the raising anti-relativistic intent. Geertz proposes a notion of 'anti anti-relativism' which recuperates cultural relativism through the perspective of universalism. Geertz presents these ideas in his *Distinguished Lecture: Anti Anti-Relativism* (1984).

Geertz notes that the raising "fear" (Geertz 1984:263) of cultural relativism is notable in the current period. Geertz uses quite an evocative language in this regard; he describes the situation with a metaphor wherein he impersonates cultural relativism as a "Dracula" and anti-relativism is a "protective cross" (Geertz 1984:272). For Geertz, the fear of cultural relativism is no more founded than the fear of Dracula. He presents anti-relativists' criticism which states that the "moral and intellectual consequences that are commonly supposed to flow from relativism - subjectivism, nihilism, incoherence, Machiavellianism, ethical idiocy, esthetic blindness, and so on - do not in fact do so and the promised rewards of escaping its clutches, mostly having to do with pasteurized knowledge, are illusory" (Geertz 1984:263). Geertz says that anti-relativists' critique is unfounded, and explains that their (universalist) knowledge production is "pasteurized", meaning that they tend to over-generalize and over-simplify concepts, discarding all the details and differences.

On the other hand, Geertz distinguishes himself from cultural relativism, because it is "a drained term anyway, yesterday's battle cry" (Geertz 1984:263). Almost a century ago, anthropologists secured cultural relativism position in anthropology, reacting to essentializing ideas posed by evolutionists of the time. The paradox in his view is that in this particular time we live in, we should improve anthropological theory, not regress with it.

Geertz emphasizes, being in favor of anti anti-relativism, that he does not want to defend or accept cultural relativism. His goal is to criticize anti-relativism. He uses logical analogy of abortion controversy: "Those of us who are opposed to increased legal restrictions on abortion are not, I take it, pro-abortion, in the sense that we think abortion a wonderful thing and hold that the greater the abortion rate the greater the well-being of society; we are "anti anti-abortionists" for quite other reasons I need not rehearse" (Geertz 1984:263,264). Geertz rhetoric enables him to "reject something without thereby committing oneself to what it rejects" (Geertz 1984:264).

Geertz believes this discussion is important for anthropology because the concept of cultural relativism was "grandly ill defined" (Geertz 1984:264). However, a lot of unfounded criticism and misleading debates result from the misunderstanding of cultural relativism. Historically, anthropology as a discipline is not relativist in itself: "It has not been anthropological theory, such as it is, that has made our field seem to be a massive argument against absolutism in thought, morals, and esthetic judgment ; it has been anthropological data: customs, crania, living floors, and lexicons" (Geertz 1984:264). Geertz claims that anthropology, *i.e.*, cultural relativism as an opposition to universalism is not embedded in theory itself. It became such through the actual experience and practice. He implies that relativistic approach towards difference was (and still is) the only way that anthropologist developed to deal with this issue. In today's global world interactions between different cultures are more and more common and cultural relativism should be used as a vessel for those interactions, through a promotion of cultural understanding.

Moreover Geertz argues that anti-relativists in their criticism wrongly perceive relativist position, and equate it with nihilism. Anti-relativist proposed theories which produced controversies in anthropology. For example, anti-relativists believe that cultural relativists' nihilism is so extreme that they consider "Hitler as just a fellow with unstandard tastes" (Geertz 1984:264). This way of thinking is misguided, as I already discussed. Relativists can still be scholars, without the implication that they approve or are passive when it comes to social injustice or human rights abuses in different cultures.

Geertz suggests that there are anthropologists who place "morality beyond culture and knowledge beyond both" (Geertz 1984:276). For him, this way of thinking more often than not leads to strengthening the existing differences or even making new ones. He implies that

universalistic declarations easily lead to essentialist condemnations, which then lead to complete misunderstanding. Geertz asserts that the role of anthropology is to tackle and draw attention to the most controversial issues, to "keep world off balance… [and that] it has been the office of others to reassure; ours to unsettle" (Geertz 1984:275). However, he also argues that sometimes anthropologists were too eager to fulfill this role, that it lead to misconceptions: "We have, no doubt, on occasion moved too far in this direction and transformed idiosyncrasies into puzzles, puzzles into mysteries, and mysteries into humbug" (Geertz 1984:275).

In conclusion, anthropologists of the time were too focused on 'unsettling' the binary opposition between cultural relativism and anti-relativism *i.e.* universalism, instead on concentrating their efforts to 'settle' on common grounds between the two schools of thought which then would have led to the development and improvement of anthropological theory, as well of its practical applications. It may be that it is possible that through this odd notion of 'anti anti-relativism' (as a form of Hegelian synthesis) which Geertz suggests that we can recuperate cultural relativism through the perspective of universalism.

6. Conclusion

Cultural relativism is a scholarly method developed in anthropology in order to properly approach the *glocal* socio-cultural differences. We should appreciate cultural diversity, especially when we come to a realization of how plural the world we live in is. Cultural relativism does not have to be just a scholarly stance, but should also be practiced in the form of everyday approach - not just as a way to deal with cultural 'novelties' but also as a way to rethink our activities and our surroundings, not taking them for granted. There are too many people still existing today who are not open to differences and do not see humanity as universally equal. In their heads they build up stigmas about others who do not fit their ideas of the 'proper'. They establish and promote hierarchies by dividing humanity based on notions such as economical well-being, ethnicity, religion, or sexual preference, to mention a few. I find these criteria irrelevant in making distinctions between human beings but, unfortunately, these essentializing notions of differentiations may result in dreadful consequences. They are the main reason why many do not have drinkable water and roof over their head; in the name of essentialist notions such as nationalism, wars where hundreds of thousands of people die are waged every day. Current socio-political situation in the world obliges us to find ways to deal with these issues. This is why we need to consider the other side of the binary - to try to find some kind of universal principles applicable to all humanity through the incorporation of cultural difference.

The way I reflect on the universality is twofold: one is scientific or anthropological where the focus is on the knowledge production in regard to how scholars understand the human through the perspective of the universal; and the other is more concerned with political effectiveness, in global problem solving, as related to cultural difference. In order to understand socio-cultural differences between the people scholars have to challenge the essentialist ways of conceptualizing the culture. We are social and cultural beings with fluid and multiple identities; hence we should not overlook the differences and similarities between and within the various cultural groups while keeping in mind their histories. Cultures of which we are a part of are dynamic, adaptive and porous so they must be studied in that manner. Every so often these

conditions are overlooked in the greater need of political freedom and self-empowerment. Often, essentialization happens non-intentionally, and with disregard for its consequences.

Herein lies the reason why we need some concrete universal setting to coordinate effectively the inequality and injustice in the world and engage in grater future. We can attain such universality only if we consider it as a continuous 'performative' and dialogic process between and within the dominant and the subaltern, and between the global and the local. Human rights discourse can provide such a universal medium if such a reconciliation between the universal and the particular is established. This can be possible through a conversation including all the voices, and with more diligent political activism of experts from the anthropological field. We do not need to choose the sides of the divide between cultural relativism and universalism, but to surpass it, accept the responsibility and engage with each other in order to overcome these problems.

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