

Sexual Justice/Cultural Justice

Critical perspectives in political theory and practice

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7 Is freedom of the will but a Western illusion?

Individual autonomy, gender and multicultural judgement

Sawitri Saharso

Introduction: two Dutch cases

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On 18 April 1988, a twenty-three-year-old Dutch Hindustani woman took her life because of the frequent maltreatment by her husband, whom she had married four years earlier. The woman's family requested that the husband be prosecuted and eventually the case went to trial. One of the charges against the husband was that he had deliberately incited her to commit suicide, using the cultural power given to him as a Hindustani husband. This was a rather exceptional accusation and the court asked for the report of a cultural expert, cultural anthropologist Henry Lamur.

This expert's conclusion for the court was, first, that Hindustani culture demands that women stay under all circumstances with their husband, and second, that it is very plausible that the victim, led by her traditional Hindustani upbringing that does not foster autonomy, was not able to decide to leave her husband (Lamur 1992).

2

On 7 December 1999 in the city of Veghel a seventeen-year-old Kurdish Turkish man shot and severely wounded several people in an attempt to kill the young man who he claimed had abducted his sister. After his arrest, his motive, he initially said, was to revenge the honour of his family (*NRC Handelsblad*, 8 December 1999).¹ It also became clear that he had been under considerable pressure from his father to act.

In the Veghel case, the court had to establish whether it was a case of honour killing and, second, whether the young man could be held fully accountable for his act, as his lawyer had alleged duress. This excuse is valid if the defendant can demonstrate that his free will was so strongly affected by his environment that he could not reasonably be expected to have acted otherwise. Again, the court called in the help of cultural experts. One of them, transcultural psychiatrist Joop de Jong, expressed his view that

in the cultural context and in the family context collective values prevail over individualistic interests. In that constellation the Western concept of freedom of the will is an illusion. There is no doubt that Ali [the son] hardly had any other choice but to act as the instrument that had to revenge the defiled honour.

(Komen 2001: 178)

Due to globalisation and international migration, cultures no longer exist – if ever they did – as closed-off wholes. At the same time we must recognise that even in a globalising world, there still exist vast cultural differences both between countries and within countries in how people behave, how they respond and in the freedom they feel to diverge from what is culturally expected of them. Honour killing, for instance, is not a universal human phenomenon. How to account for these differences? In the honour killing case the court largely ignored the cultural expert's view, as in the suicide case, it rejected the charge of incitement to suicide. The question I would like to raise is why in both cases the cultural experts were convinced that the person in question was less capable of autonomy than the assumed average "Western" person. Could they perhaps be right? What is at stake is clear: if we wrongfully deny cultural differences in the capacity for autonomy we may withhold support from women who need it; if we wrongfully recognise these differences we may end up excusing crimes that we otherwise would not excuse.

What I intend to do in this chapter is to argue that the claim that freedom of the will is but a Western illusion is wrong, because it conflates cultural notions of the self with the psychological reality of the self. I shall first discuss the history of the Western liberal philosophy of autonomy and, second, confront that history with what mainly anthropological and psychological studies on culture and personality have to tell us about autonomy. As my aim is to invoke a very general idea of autonomy as it is accepted within each of the disciplines, I shall not differentiate between schools within them or engage with recent debates, but concentrate on "modern" classics. In anthropology, however, I also explicitly seek dissident voices, as I must confess that for obvious reasons I am rather reluctant to accept the idea that autonomy is but a Western illusion.

Liberal philosophy on personal autonomy

What, according to liberals, is personal autonomy and what are its preconditions? I shall not give a definition, but instead discuss some ideas that I take to be central to the liberal conception of autonomy.

Autonomy as a moral ideal

The concept of moral autonomy generally means that individuals are free to lead their lives in accordance with their own values. This is what Kymlicka means when he calls an autonomous life a life "from the inside" (1995: 81). What is the

value of autonomy? Some argue that autonomy is conducive to the realisation of other valuable ends. Because people themselves know best what is good for them, so runs John Stuart Mill's famous argument, it is better to let them choose for themselves how they want to live. It promotes their happiness. The value of autonomy lies, hence, in its instrumental value for reaching human welfare. Others think that autonomy does not have to produce valuable ends; it is itself part of those ends. If it were possible to bring us to a state of happiness without our active involvement, they argue, we would not find this satisfying, because in our ideas happiness is inextricably bound up with autonomy. We do not want to passively undergo our lives, we want to have chosen our lives. As Christman puts it: "No claim of value could be plausible unless it is presupposed that such judgements about what is good for people are autonomously made" (1988: 121). Autonomy thus conceived has intrinsic value.

Autonomy as a right and a capacity

A distinction is often made between autonomy as a right and as a capacity. Let us start with the first. The freedom to make one's own choices and act upon them can be restricted by external forces. The right to autonomy presupposes the absence of external coercion and is also described by some as a right to sovereignty, i.e. the right to govern oneself without being interfered with by others (Feinberg 1986: 47-51). The capacity for autonomy refers to an internal condition of freedom of the will and presupposes certain mental abilities, in particular, rationality and self-reflexivity. When these abilities are affected, as in the case of the comatose, demented or severely mentally disabled, this is an internal impediment that restricts the capacity for autonomy (Feinberg 1986: 28-31).

Autonomy and authenticity

If someone is brainwashed or manipulated, we are not inclined to consider his/her choices as really his/her choices, i.e. as expressions of his will. Autonomy is more than just the absence of external coercion. The freedom to act is neither a necessary nor a sufficient precondition for freedom of the will (Dworkin 1989: 60). For a person to be autonomous, s/he must identify with his/her desires, literally make them his/her own (Dworkin 1989). His/her moral beliefs should not be acquired through mindless conformism or unthinking obedience to authority, but rather from "a committed process of continually reconstructing the value system inherited" (Feinberg 1986: 36-37). It is also conceivable that a person is influenced in his/her choices by others in such a fashion that we do not view them as his/her own. This is what Dworkin calls "a failure in procedural independence" (1989: 61). He therefore describes autonomy as authenticity plus procedural independence: "A person is autonomous if he identifies with his desires, goals and values, and such identification is not itself influenced in ways which make the process of identification in some way alien to the individual" (1989: 61). Thus, not the content of a choice, but the way

in which it is reached, determines whether it is an autonomous choice. Dworkin again: "An autonomous person may be a saint or a sinner, a rugged individualist or a conformist, a leader or a follower" (1989: 62).

Autonomy and moral responsibility

The person who acts because someone is holding a pistol to his/her head is not normally accountable for his/her act. It is generally supposed that someone is only morally responsible for his/her act if s/he could have acted otherwise. Frankfurt nuances this view. The assumption that someone is morally responsible for what s/he has done means that s/he did it of his/her own free will. This implies that even if s/he could have acted differently, s/he would not have done so. It is therefore not relevant for the evaluation of someone's moral responsibility to ask whether the alternatives that s/he has not chosen were actually available to him/her. From this it follows that when a person acted as s/he wanted to act, s/he is morally responsible for what s/he has done, even if alternative ways of acting were not available to him/her, and s/he could in that sense not have acted otherwise (Frankfurt 1989: 73).

Autonomy and socialisation

The concept of autonomy emphasises that we define ourselves independently of others. Yet at the same time, we know that we are socially constituted human beings. Liberals do not dispute this. Feinberg explains how the two can be compatible:

Most of what we fulfil when we fulfil ourselves are dispositions implanted by our communities, and most of what we exercise when we exercise our autonomy is what our communities created in us in the first place. . . . But the selves we inherited in part from these communities might nonetheless be free to select some of their subsequent affiliations and to freely exercise their autonomy in making new communal commitments, with new consequences for their personal identities. Self-creation is possible within this community-created setting, even though the self in its capacity as creator is itself a social product. (Feinberg 1988: 89)

We do not freely choose ourselves; neither do we freely choose our principles. Also, the possible choices we can imagine for ourselves are limited by the possibilities for choice that are available in our culture. In that sense, our culture is our horizon beyond which we cannot look (Margalit and Raz 1990). Where then should we locate that moment of autonomy in all this social constitutedness? It lies in our reflexive judgement about ourselves and the world around us and in the subjective identification that can follow upon that reflection. Autonomy is not a pre-social quality, but a capacity that gradually develops

during socialisation, and is linked with the development of the mental ability of critical reflection.

Autonomy as a conditional quality

Autonomy in its legal sense is what Feinberg calls a "threshold concept": either you possess the capacities that qualify you for the right of self-government or you do not (1986: 30). Yet this does not imply that we are all equally capable of autonomy. In the words of Feinberg again: autonomy is "a property admitting of 'more' and 'less'" (1986: 30). This is partly because autonomy is, as stated above, a capacity that we acquire gradually, one whose development is linked to certain conditions. These are summarised by Joseph Raz as: "appropriate mental abilities, an adequate range of options, and independence" (1986: 372). If conditions exist for autonomy, it follows that there are circumstances that are more or less conducive to its development. Feinberg refers to "dispositions of character, feeling, or sensibility, and differences in life-circumstances" (1986: 30). Also, when Dworkin specifies the conditions for procedural independence, "distinguishing those ways of influencing people's reflective and critical faculties which subvert them from those which promote and improve them", he draws on this same idea of autonomy as a conditional quality (1989: 61). Hence, while all normal, mentally healthy persons have the innate capacity for autonomy, it is a capacity that needs to be developed. As the conditions for its development are not equally distributed among people, some are more capable of autonomy than are others.

Liberal autonomy: a preliminary conclusion

My problem with the liberal conception of autonomy is not that it is anti-social. Liberals conceive of autonomy as a socially constituted capacity of a person who is herself a social product. In fact, the liberal conceptualisation of autonomy goes a long way to account for the two cases I started with. We can see now that how incomprehensible a choice may appear to us – and both cases involve choices most people would not make – is not relevant for the question of whether the choice counts as an autonomous one. Autonomy is not defined by the content of a choice.

Yet applying the liberal approach to autonomy to the cases also raises many questions: did these persons endorse the ideal of a life lived from the inside? Would they have passed the authenticity test? Probably not, as moral beliefs that are derived from conformism or obedience to authority are ruled out. And how about their moral responsibility: did they act as they wanted to act? That depends on whether there was enough of a separate "I" that could subjectively identify with its desires, goals and values.

Liberal philosophy recognises that autonomy requires certain mental capacities; it also allows for the idea that there are circumstances that are more or less conducive to the development of autonomy. But it is rather silent about the *cultural* preconditions for autonomy. Liberal philosophy seems therefore to be less

able to account for the most unsettling aspect of both cases: the suggestion by the experts that differences in the mental capacity of autonomy are culturally determined. It allows for differences between persons but, as it conceives of autonomy as basically a universal human capacity, it does not allow for *culturally bound* differences in the capacity for autonomy.

It is time to turn to the culture and personality studies. What do they have to offer?

Culture and personality studies on individual autonomy

Before I start, some words of caution are warranted. Comparative studies on culture and personality tend to look for extremes, meaning that they often focus on Japan, or sometimes India, as representing one extreme and the United States as the other. This leads to a certain distortion, as Dutch culture, for instance, is generally believed to be less individualistic than American culture and Turkish Kurds will no doubt differ in important aspects from the Japanese. This is one thing to keep in mind. Second, these East-West comparisons tend to suggest a certain timelessness, as if cultures do not develop. Of course they do, and particularly so in a time of globalisation and international migration. One might even wonder whether such things as cultures and cultural differences in personality still exist. My impression is that precisely for this reason much of recent anthropology has given up the attempt to make this sort of cultural comparison. That is to say, since Barth (1969) introduced the situational approach to ethnicity, the focus of political anthropology has been on the strategic use cultural groups make of notions of culture and identity. Postcolonial theory and postmodern theory of cultural identity, on the other hand, see cultural identity mainly as an unstable and "decentred" complex of social meanings and focus on processes of hybridisation and the cultural (de)construction of identities. This, in effect, means that the dominant paradigm in modern anthropology is social constructivism and questions of culture and personality seem obsolete. In that sense, it is also by default that I base my reconstruction of anthropology's theory of autonomy on older sources (and this chapter may be read as a rehabilitation of these sources). This gives rise, of course, to the problem that I want to make empirical claims, yet accept that cultures and identities do change over time. One might well question the relevance of a study conducted thirty or more years ago in India for understanding the behaviour of a woman of Hindustani background in the Netherlands of the 1980s. I could partly make up for this by incorporating studies on value transmittance among immigrant groups in the Netherlands. But the limitation of my sources should be borne in mind.

The classical anthropological view: sociocentric versus egocentric personalities

A first glance at the anthropological literature shows that the views of the two cultural experts I quoted at the beginning of this chapter are fairly standard. I recall the famous anthropologist Clifford Geertz's statement:

The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgement, and action organized into a distinctive whole and against a social and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the rest of the world cultures.

(Geertz 1973: 48)

This now celebrated statement seems paradigmatic of much of the anthropological work on culture and the self in which Asian conceptions of the self are contrasted to the Western conception.² In an earlier effort to account for how cultural differences affect the capacity for autonomy (Saharso 2000), I made a distinction between: (1) cultural conceptions of the self; (2) socialisation; and (3) the actual psychic structuring of the self. In the rest of this chapter I retain this distinction.

The concept of the person

Cultural conceptions of the self are studied by analysing the normative cultural conceptions of what a person is that are contained in mainly religious texts, but also by studying ordinary people and finding out about their views on personhood.³

Evidence against the concept of the person as an autonomous, bounded, abstract individual typically seems to rest on two claims: that in "non-Western" social thought on the person; (1) the end-goal of human existence is not to find one's distinctive identity, but to free oneself from it; and (2) the idea of a person as abstracted from context is inconceivable, because what a person is, is inextricably bound to context.

Read, for instance, Mara Miller on Confucianism:

The value that Western philosophies ascribe to autonomous selves, the necessary relations they perceive between autonomy and virtue/goodness in ethics, and the recognition of the individual as the foundation of the polity are all quite foreign to Confucianism, which perceives individuals as most fully 'self-actualising' when most deeply connected to society. (1997: 152)⁴

A classical empirical study is Richard Shweder and Edmund Bourne's (1984) comparative study of descriptions of a person in India (Orissa) and the United States. They found that among Indians a context-dependent conception of the person is more prevalent (Shweder and Bourne 1984: 172-178). This context-dependent conception of the person could be explained by the widespread view that "the individual person *per se* is neither an object of importance nor inherently worthy of respect ... a view that, indeed, the individual as an abstract ethical and normative category is not to be acknowledged" [italics in original]

(Shweder and Bourne 1984: 158). Likewise, the social psychologists Heine *et al.* write that "within Japanese culture there is a shared belief in the interdependence of the self with others ... [the self] is not considered to be separate and autonomous" (1999: 770).

The methods used and the regions studied vary. Yet these studies all point to a similar distinction between cultures and corresponding concepts of the person. This distinction is usually described in terms of a "sociocentric" versus an "egocentric" culture or a "collectivistic" versus an "individualistic" culture, which would correspond with a notion of the person as an "interdependent self" versus the notion of a person as an "independent self".

Value transmittance in socialisation

The literature on socialisation indicates that in collectivistic cultures the accent in socialisation is on the transmittance of collectivistic values and this would correspond with specific child-rearing patterns. There is again a lot of research on Asian cultures, including Lebra and Lebra (1986), Markus and Kitayama (1991) and Roland (1996). Recently, a series of studies has been conducted on value orientations among Muslims (of Turkish and Moroccan descent) in the Netherlands. Therefore, instead of turning to Asia, I shall discuss these studies. The autonomy of Islamic women and young people in the Netherlands is increasing, yet the majority of Dutch Muslims prefer to live according to traditional family values, which include a separation of and hierarchy between the sexes and generations (Phalet and Wal 2004). These are also the values they transmit in their child-rearing practices. They attach great value to conformist socialisation goals, e.g. obedience to parents, maintenance of family honour, respect for parents, adherence to Islamic prescriptions, and awareness of shame. More autonomy-oriented goals, e.g. a sense of responsibility and the ability to judge independently, are not considered by many parents as important socialisation goals (Nijstén 1998; Pels and Haan 2004). This research suggests that although change is taking place, socialisation among Islamic Turkish and Moroccan immigrants in the Netherlands is aimed more at the promotion of collectivistic values and less at the promotion of individuality and autonomy.

The psychic structuring of the self

In collectivistic cultures, behaviour would be regulated through shame rather than through guilt. As one of my examples concerns a case of honour killing, it seems relevant to take a closer look at shame and guilt. In a psychological sense, what is shame and what is guilt? Shame and guilt are both behaviour-regulating mechanisms that work either through discouraging socially undesirable behaviour (guilt) or through promoting socially desirable behaviour (shame).

It is important to realise that both shame and guilt are internalised feelings.⁵ Creighton again:

True guilt must be accompanied by the individual's internal recognition of transgressing the *superego*. If not, the individual only fears the consequences of an act and does not feel the tension of guilt in the true sense. Shame must also involve a correspondent internal feeling in the individual that the inadequacy perceived by others is valid. If not, the resulting emotion is more likely to be fear, embarrassment, indifference, frustration, or anger, rather than true shame.

(Creighton 1990: 287)

Hence, the difference between people raised in shame cultures and those raised in guilt cultures is not that the former would not possess an internal conscience that regulates their behaviour and would react to external sanctions only. The difference is rather that when they have a bad conscience, because they have transgressed moral boundaries, it is more likely to be a shameful conscience than a guilty one.

Lastly, in all cultures people experience feelings of both guilt and shame. Creighton's suggestion is that there is a large range of varying emphasis between cultures in their use of either guilt or shame sanctions as mechanisms to socialise the individual. This cultural emphasis on either shame or guilt would be consistent with other aspects of the culture in which a person is socialised. Creighton:

I believe Japanese society is integrated more by shame and that this form of integration is consistent with prevailing child-rearing practices, the basic philosophical view of human nature; and, in particular, the cultural value placed on group-oriented behaviour as opposed to independence and individuality.

(1990: 293-294)

The claim is hence that there is a relationship between the normative ideas about personhood that are dominant in a culture, socialisation and the personality make-up of individuals raised in that culture.

Counter-evidential studies: beyond caricature?

The concept of the person: autonomous individuality within sociocentrism

In my search for counter-narratives I did come across studies that do not present autonomy as a Western invention; to give but one example, the Mimamsaka school of orthodox Brahmanhood, which flourished in the ninth to tenth century. Alexis Sanderson writes:

Orthodox Brahmanhood entailed a life of exacting ritual and duty, which required the relentless avoidance of the forbidden and contaminant in all

aspects of the person's existence... The Brahman could maintain his privileged position at the summit of the hierarchy of nature only by conformity to his dharma, to the conduct prescribed for him in accordance with his caste and stage of life. In harmony with his convictions that the Vedic rituals were mechanisms dependent for their results only on the exactitude of their performance and that these results would accrue to him alone as their agent, he held that his present experience and all the perceptible aspects of his identity were the outcome of nothing but his own actions.

(Sanderson 1985: 195-196)

According to Sanderson:

The Mimamsaka defined the orthodox self as active, individual and eternal, but devoid of all creativity... His notions of autonomous agency individualised the person, but his determination by a world of revealed duties, his wish to conform to the Brahmanical ideal, depersonalised this individual, purging him of all independent motivations.

(1985: 195-196)

It is this last conclusion that sets the Mimamsaka notions of the self again very much apart from the liberal self. Moreover, should the Indologists read this study, they would probably not see it as contradicting their views. For as Shweder and Bourne write, "Indians do have a notion of 'autonomous individualism', but for an Indian to be an autonomous individual one must leave society. The autonomous individual is the holy man, the renouncer, the *sadhu*, the 'dropout'" (1984: 191). I conclude therefore that collectivistic cultural notions of the person are not necessarily devoid of individuality and autonomy, but the thrust of the literature on culture and personality is that there are major differences in this respect.

Socialisation: values in context

The understanding of the literature discussed above on culture and personality is that persons who are socialised in a collectivistic culture internalise these values and develop a personality that is sociocentric rather than individualistic and autonomous. Yet we only have to think of the women's movement or the peasants' rebellions in Asia to realise that there are ample examples where people socialised in a collectivistic culture demonstrate that they are capable of acting autonomously. People do not always perceive of themselves or act in accordance with cultural prescriptions.⁶ Note also the seeming incongruity in Geertz's work on Moroccans: his general argument is that Moroccans have a contextual and relativistic conception of selfhood, yet he also thinks that Moroccans are individualistic and even wilful (Geertz 1984: 132). The most likely explanation of Geertz's remarks is that in his general argument he was referring to the Moroccan conception of the self, which does not preclude their being individualistic and wilful in

their actual behaviour. Still, it remains intriguing that a cultural upbringing can transmit collectivistic values, yet with individualistic behaviour as an outcome. Trees Pels and Mariette de Haan (2004) offer the following explanation. Child-rearing patterns among Moroccans in the Netherlands are predominantly geared towards promoting conformism, not autonomy. Yet value preferences and actual behaviour, they claim, are context dependent. In Morocco as in the Netherlands, it is within the context of the family that collectivistic values count. Outside the family sphere the situation is more that of unstable alliances; whether the scales tip towards solidarity or competition is dependent on the situation.

Lastly, I want to mention some programmes that are developed for women and whose aim is to enhance their autonomy. Diana Meyers (2000) discusses a number of educational programmes aimed at increasing African women's autonomy regarding female genital mutilation and Uigdem Kagitcibasi (1996) reports on a mother-training programme that was developed within the framework of a family intervention programme in Turkey. These programmes proved to effectively enhance the participants' autonomy skills. Hence, even if one's socialisation does not promote the capacity for autonomy, it can be acquired later in life.

From the above we can infer, first, that cultural messages are not total, but must be specified for contexts. Conformist values may dominate in the family realm, but not necessarily in all realms of life. Second, socialisation is never total. This in the sense that different children will react differently to the same child-rearing style and develop into different personalities, and in the sense that our socialisation does not define for life who we are. We can change.

The psychic structuring of the self: from particularistic to generic cultural determinism

The culture and personality studies hypothesised that collectivistic cultures produce sociocentric personalities, whose mental capacities for autonomy are less developed than those of persons raised in individualistic cultures. Let us now consider these mental capacities. As it is psychoanalytic theory's ambition to understand how the psyche is structured, this is the perspective I shall use. According to classical psychoanalytic theory, the normal outcome of the identity process is an individual with firm ego boundaries, who experiences him/herself as a differentiated but organised unity, who exists independent of and differentiated from his/her environment. That is to say: the normal outcome of the identification process is the autonomous individual (Meissner 1988).

The first attempts to delineate the psyche of non-Western peoples stressed that they were completely different from Western people: they did not develop an ego-identity, as separation from the mother is followed not by individuation but by identification with the group (Parin *et al.* 1974; Wulff 1972). This view has been modified by later studies. I take as an example some studies on South Asian personality.

South Asians possess "a highly empathic, nonverbal sensitivity to one another's feelings and needs without the other having to verbalize them",

according to Allan Roland (1996: 32). This is because the child's differentiation of himself from his mother comes chronologically later than in the West (Kakar 1978: 104). This is further explained as functional in the setting of close-knit extended family relations. Relationships characterised by such close emotional engagement leave little room for individuality. However, another characteristic of the extended family is that family relations are hierarchical, this hierarchy being organised along lines of age and gender. The young, and in particular young women, are expected to comply with the needs and wishes of other family members. Their scope for autonomous action is therefore limited. But is their mental ability for autonomy also limited?

Following Katherine Ewing (1991), I want to argue that we should distinguish between interpersonal and intrapsychic autonomy: for South Asian women the former is indeed often diminished while the latter can be highly developed. Intrapsychic autonomy is "the ability to maintain enduring mental representations of sources of self-esteem and comfort, permitting a more flexible adaptation to the vicissitudes of the immediate environment" (Ewing 1991: 132). Ewing also describes intrapsychic autonomy as "the ability to maintain a conscious awareness of one's inner thoughts and feelings when these differ from one's overt actions and may be socially unacceptable" (1991: 141). We might, then, consider "intrapsychic autonomy" as the psychoanalytical equivalent of what in the liberal account is understood by the capacity of autonomy or freedom of the will, and "interpersonal autonomy" as the right to act autonomously. Of the two, intrapsychic autonomy is, for Ewing, clearly more fundamental. It means that "in many South Asian families, individually family members do in fact act in an autonomous fashion intrapsychically, while ... accepting the demands for conformity within the family" (1991: 139). Hence conformist outer behaviour does not always reflect a conformist inner world.

Next, Ewing claims that it is not only possible for a low degree of interpersonal autonomy to go together with a high degree of intrapsychic autonomy, but the latter is even necessary to survive without psychological damage in these situations. It is due to the firmly consolidated inner world of self and object representations that the experience of merger of self and social role is never total. In fact, Ewing found that merger experiences, i.e. failure to achieve this separation, led, as in the West, to severe psychopathology, notably depression (1991: 132).

In this way, Ewing qualifies the idea that cultural differences lead to virtually incompatible differences in personality structure. Two authors who move away from this idea even more radically are Melford Spiro (1984) and Nancy Chodorow (1999). Both authors discuss, or rather offer an alternative interpretation of, a wide range of ethnographic studies, including Michelle Rosaldo's classic study on Ilongot culture (Rosaldo 1984). Ilongot culture does not allow its members to express anger towards each other. The Ilongots do not repress their anger, but do not experience feelings of anger at all, Rosaldo claimed. Spiro disputes this. The Ilongots appear to be headhunters. In the violence they display in hacking off the head of an "enemy" and in their treatment of the

cadaver (they chop it up until it has no body form) Spiro sees the expression of displaced anger. He suggests that their headhunting expeditions are "the symbolic form by which repressed anger toward their fellows is both displaced and gratified". (Spiro 1984: 332). Hence, the way of expressing aggression is culture-bound, yet the psychological disposition to aggression that the Ilorgots display is not. From this and other evidence he infers that human behaviour and human feeling are ruled by certain psychological universals, in the sense of a common set of deep psychological structures (Spiro 1984: 334). Spiro sees this "generic human mind" as shaped not by a particular culture, but by culture in general. It is through the immersion in culture that the unformed human infant develops its psychic capacities. Chodorow largely agrees with this, yet thinks that the creation of self and subjectivity is a personal psychodynamic process and not only a cultural construction (1999: 130, 217). A generic trait of culture is that it allows for imagination. Their suggestion is, as I understand them, that not only do people in all cultures possess the power of imagination, but our very identity rests in a large part on imagination. Our social identity is shaped by cultural myths, symbols and language, which all need the human imagination for their existence, while our individual identity is shaped by a process of personal meaning giving, which is also an act of the imagination. Although these authors do not directly address the issue of (intrapsychic) autonomy, I infer from them that the capacity of autonomy also rests on the mental ability of imagination. If we want to distance ourselves from our current roles, critically reflect upon our lives or revise our life plans, what we draw upon is our capacity for imagination. Hence, I am inclined to consider an (untamed) capacity for imagination to be an important requirement for intrapsychic autonomy. We need culture, but not a particular culture, to develop our imagination, and, second, all cultures, even the most collectivistic ones, allow their members to develop this capacity of imagination.⁷ To sum up: I began my account of culture and autonomy with, as Spiro so aptly phrased it, a "particularistic cultural determinism" to find myself (temporarily) ending on a "generic cultural determinism".

Conclusion

Liberalism conceives of autonomy as conducive to human welfare. Connected to this is a notion of the person as an authentic person who possesses the right to act autonomously and who is able to use that right because s/he has in his/her socialisation developed the necessary mental abilities.

Yet there are many cultures around the world where autonomy is not an (important) moral value, that do not stimulate autonomy through child-rearing practices, and there are many people, in particular women, who live in circumstances that restrict their right of autonomy. Still they have developed the mental capacity of autonomy. How can we understand this?

First, the distinction between collectivistic and individualistic cultures corresponding with sociocentric and egocentric personality types needs to be qualified. What I described are tendencies.

My reading of counter-evidential studies is that cultural messages are not total and that socialisation is never total. There is hence more personal variation within cultures and more commonality in personality between cultures than this binary opposition allows. It is mainly because of the work of Ewing that I am now more inclined to see the relationship between individuality and autonomy as less direct than the culture and personality studies assumed. Also, in less individuated personalities, the capacity for autonomy can be present. However, we may criticise the culture and personality studies for their tendency, following Spiro, towards "particularistic cultural determinism", but how do we avoid again ending up with a conception of the capacity for autonomy as a pre-social given? Is cultural socialisation so inadequate? A further explanation that I take from Spiro and Chodorow is that an important mental requirement for the capacity for autonomy is that one is capable of imagination. A generic trait of all cultures is that they allow their members to develop their imagination – in fact it is by the grace of the human imagination that cultures exist. A curtailed right to act autonomously does not affect this capacity (cf. Dworkin's idea that the freedom to act is not a necessary precondition for freedom of the will), nor is the cultural expectation of conformist behaviour ever total. In most cultures there are designated spheres or contexts, notably the family, where in particular the young and women are not supposed to act autonomously. The implications for the two cases I began with are as follows.

The claim that freedom of the will is but a Western illusion is wrong, because it is an over-generalisation. It conflates cultural notions of the self with the psychological reality of the self. There is no reason to assume that the young man or the young woman because of their cultural background would lack the capacity for autonomy.

In the honour killing case the young man acted under heavy pressure from his father, but such pressure does not deprive one of one's capacity of autonomy. Moreover, as the work of Creighton teaches us, it is a cultural misunderstanding to assume that a person who is raised in a shame culture would lack a personal conscience and cannot therefore be held personally responsible for his deeds. In that sense, his culture does not exonerate the young man.

For the suicide case, a relevant finding is that in all cultures, including collectivistic ones, a merger between self and social role constitutes psychopathology. It is in the space between self and social role that autonomy can exist. Again, it is not so much the right to act autonomously that is a necessary precondition for the existence of intrapsychic autonomy, but rather this inner space. It may be that the Hindustani woman never developed the state of object constancy that would have enabled her to psychologically distance herself from the vicissitudes of her immediate environment. As we know that battering can have the effect of narrowing and distorting the consciousness of the victim, another possibility is that she tragically failed to maintain this separation between herself and her role due to battering. Therefore, it does not suffice to attribute the woman's death to her culture being collectivistic.⁸

Lastly, my *tour d'horizon* of various disciplines and continents has taught me that context matters. That insight, however, sits uneasily with all that I argued

before, because both cases involved a context in which in culture of the person concerned expected obedience: a father/son relationship and a husband/wife relationship. It may very well be that in individual cases this exerts a pressure on the persons concerned that restricts their freedom to decide against cultural imperatives.⁹ In that sense the cultural experts were right. We may well possess a common capacity for autonomy, yet this does not preclude the existence of such differences. Although not in the realm of deep psychological structures, they are still deep enough to be troubling and difficult to deal with as a matter of (criminal) justice.

Notes

- 1 "Honour killing" is a phenomenon that is known in a wide range of countries; in the Netherlands it occurs in particular among immigrants originating from Turkey. The killing is usually planned. In a family deliberation it is decided that the victim, by her, or his, behaviour, has defiled the honour of the family, and in order to restore it the transgressor needs to be killed. The young man later withdrew his statement, most likely because he had by then discovered that the motive of honour revenge leads to higher sentences in the Netherlands. For information on honour killing see Maris and Saharso (2001).
- 2 Because of space limits and because a better understanding of non-Western personalities is needed to account for my two cases I shall not discuss the "peculiarity" of the Western notion of the person. For this see Spiro (1993).
- 3 For overviews see Allen (1997), Carrithers *et al.* (2004) and Shweder and Levine (1984).
- 4 To be fair to Miller I must add that she herself thinks that Buddhism and Confucianism recognise much more autonomy on the part of the individual than is usually assumed (1997: 146).
- 5 Ruth Benedict, from whom the distinction originates, thought that shame was external and only guilt internal. Others saw in this a cultural value judgement as they assumed that she considered guilt as belonging to a higher level of moral development than shame. For a discussion of this critique see Creighton (1990).
- 6 For a review, see Spiro (1993).
- 7 The fact that even the most extreme totalitarian regimes, like the Nazi concentration camps, which aimed at destroying their victims' autonomy and individuality, were in most cases not able to do so, bears witness to the impressive force of the imagination. Bruno Bettelheim (1960) even contended that it was a sine qua non for survival; those who came to accept the camp reality as the only reality, and thus could no longer imagine that another world existed, turned into "saltpillars" who were soon to die. See also James Scott (1985: chapter 8, in particular pp. 327–328).
- 8 Actually, propensity to suicidal behaviour appears to be related to gender and culture, but the nature of that relationship is as yet not clear. See Saharso (2003).
- 9 In fact the Dutch system of criminal justice, which operates on the basis of the principle of individualised justice, can and normally will take this into account as a relevant personal factor.

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