BEYOND INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN:
THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF FEDERALISM
(A NORMATIVE APPROACH)

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"Federalism requires mutuality, not command, multiple rather than single causation, a sharing instead of a monopoly of power."

Aaron Wildavsky (1976)

"Federalism is not just a form of government; it is a method for solving problems, a way of life."

Vincent Ostrom (1991)

1. *Endogenous federal institutions and federal political culture*

The implications of federalism reach beyond a particular institutional design, or interactive set of actors and institutions that articulate *decentralization* in decision-making and *accommodation* of ethnic or national diversity, to include *interpretation* or *a federal vision* of politics. This somewhat neglected interpretative dimension of federalism, the complex "way of life" (Ostrom 1991) that it advocates and its specific manner of providing political meaning requires fresh attention.

Recent developments in the comparative study of federalism, namely the positive political economy approach and neo-institutionalism, have provided a very solid body of work on institutions (second territorial chambers, judicial power, constitutional courts) as well as fiscal matters, elections, party systems and other key dimensions of federations. These new studies have moved the subject beyond the abstract normative discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of federations to more precisely address the specific incentives of the various institutional designs and contexts. However, this neo-institutionalist approach focuses primarily on strategic interactions between political parties and institutions and tends to marginalize the essential dimension of the cultural interpretation of federalism. Leaving behind the now trivial statements that "institutions matter" and "federal institutions play a causal role in explaining

outcomes", it is important to note that federal institutions are *endogenous* (Rodden 2006): an effect and product of various social, political and cultural contextual factors *beyond design*. It is significant that a portion of the most recent positive literature, including the *theory of self-sustainable federal institutions* (Filippov, Ordeshook, Shvetsova 2004), turns a blind eye to the decisive, normative and empirical questions that cultural pluralism and multi-nationality raise for federations. This does not pose a problem for the positive political economy or rational choice perspective *per se*, as other authors clearly show (Laitin & Fearon 1996, Laitin & Weingast 2006, Bakke & Wibbels 2006, Treisman 2007), but it marginalizes cultural aspects of the behavior of institutions and actors by favoring strategic rationality and the maximization of interests.

The production of meaning, beliefs and values, habits and dispositions, are all undeniably relevant political factors in a reciprocal relationship with actions and institutions. Tocqueville considered it unfeasible to apply U.S. federalism to countries lacking the enabling factor of a federal culture. William Riker (1964: 111) concluded from his review of federalism in the U.S. that "the fundamental feature … standing behind these institutions is the popular sentiment of loyalty to different levels of government, which sentiment serves as channel for development for centralizing or peripheralizing institutions". Moreover Bevir & Rhodes (2006) noted that a variety of political beliefs and values are holistic: they only acquire meaning within a broader landscape of principles, dispositions and orientations. It is impossible to understand even federal actions and political institutions from the sole perspective of their necessary but insufficient *game interests*; leaving aside the ideas and emotions that inspire them.

Federalism requires a self-sustainable and robust institutional design (a federation), a complex, decentralized party system, and a *set of attitudes and values*: a shared political understanding that provides civic support for the system. In other words, *federalism* cannot be reduced to the mechanics of the *federation* (Burgess 2006: 47). It involves a program or set of ideas, a substantive political vision, a common cultural capital that defines and when necessary condemns deviant behaviors; constituting for each country *appropriate or permissible federal behavior* at the various levels of government. This federal perspective is articulated in three tightly-interwoven normative spheres: 1) a *political theory* rooted in an extensive federal-republican tradition; 2) an ideology

linked to a *political movement*; 3) the empirical-normative aspect of a *shared federal political culture*, which we shall examine here.

  All of this has been too easily ignored in recent comparative or neo-institutional political economy studies, which have overcome the classical normative rhetoric of "benevolent despots" (Oates), "voting with the feet" (Tiebout) or the new "Leviathan" (Hayek, Buchanan) and focus exclusively on the interplay between actors and institutions. Many authors have insisted on the need to compensate for the notorious deficit in updated normative theories of federalism, in regards to the idea of the State as well as the Nation (LaSelva 1996; Burgess 2006; Norman 2006; Gagnon 2009, 2011; Máiz 2011). This study argues and explores aspects of the vital but neglected political-cultural dimension from a normative theory perspective that is not entirely lacking in suggestions for empirical research.

It is striking to contrast the hundreds of studies about institutional, constitutional, fiscal, stasiological, or electoral aspects of federalism with the handful of studies regarding its *cognitive and attitudinal interpretative support structure*. Among these few are the works of Kincaid and Cole (2004, 2011), who in a comparative analysis of Canada, Mexico and the U.S. pointed out the tight correlation between the degree of political decentralization and the presence of a federal culture among citizens. Fafard et al. (2010) took an additional step 'inside the box' by analyzing how the normative dimensions of federalism are manifest in the nature and insubstantiality of federal political culture in Canada. For Spain, Martinez-Herrera (2005, 2010) highlights the centrality of attitudinal over cognitive mechanisms and the internalization of norms and values that reinforce sophisticated citizen interaction with multi-level decision-making and participation contexts.

Federalism is again at the forefront of the international political agenda concerning Iraq, India, Spain, Belgium and even Canada or the European Union. It is more necessary than ever to leave behind ambiguities and answer specific questions regarding *what kind of federalism should be offered* in each context, given the many different possibilities (Burgess 2005, Watts 2008). Perhaps the time has come to remember that federalism is something more than a set of institutions and actors: *it is also a normative ideal,* "a federal creed" (Grodzins 1966: 314) and *a set of beliefs, values, attitudes and civic dispositions.* The consolidation and development of federalism requires a *federal thinking*, a distinct way of conceptualizing shared and horizontal power (Elazar 1987: 192). Thus, the classical empirical-normative dimensions of federalism (Watts &

Blindenbacher 2003) should be extended and articulated into a coherent whole composed of: 1) a multi-level government guaranteed by institutional safeguards; 2) a constitution and the rule of law at all levels; 3) a decentralized party system; 4) experimentation and differentiation of public policies; and 5) a federal political culture that guarantees popular control based on agreements, negotiation, reciprocity and mutual respect. This federal political culture among citizens should include both a) the capacity for adequate attribution of responsibilities between different levels of government (*who does what*): in other words, agreement on the limits of what is tolerated in the actions at different decision-making levels and acceptance of experimentation and differentiation of public policies (Fafard et al 2010, Schneider et al 2011); as well as b) tolerance and respect for cultural, linguistic and national pluralism and accommodation of superimposed identities and loyalties (Kincaid & Cole 2011).

An examination of the more recent albeit classical literature on this reveals that the cultural dimension composes a basic axis of the federal model. A federation requires a federal political culture, which is distinct from a unitary political culture (Duchacek 1980: 343). A federal culture consists of a set of values and approaches to the system, that vary according to the degree of federalism in each country, as Livingston (1968) suggested based on Almond & Verba. Elazar (1987: 78) holds that "in many respects, the viability of the federal system is directly related to the degree to which federalism has been internalized culturally". Wildavsky (1998: 40) summed it up nicely: "Federalism… cannot sustain itself without the underlying support of political culture".

Philosopher John Searle recently remarked on how political realities ('institutional' realities in his words) such as states and nations are only constituted, maintained and developed when they are *recognized and accepted* by the citizens; in fact, they only exist when there is a shared belief in them. As *deontic powers* (which provide reasons for action that are independent from our desires), their very existence depends on their being commonly accepted. From an ontological perspective, political realities are linguistically constituted and cannot exist without their own language. So, the dimension of *meaning* is politically crucial (Searle 2010). Providing meaning is very much within the field of culture: it involves the extension of values and attitudes, vocabularies, metaphors and narratives that build and/or reinforce institutions. Just as a democracy cannot exist without democrats -citizens infused with civic culture-federalism cannot develop without a solid federative culture. Stepping outside the strictly cognitive dimension, the individual internalized dispositions that connect

citizens with political and social structures suggest the necessity of a *federative habitus* among citizens (Bourdieu 1979). In sum, these "shared understandings and skills" (Ostrom 1991: 247) constitute the *moral psychology of federalism*, an indispensible, attitudinal and cognitive *self-enforcing* cultural mechanism for federal institutions (Weinstock 2005).

In spite of the scarce research in this field and the obvious difficulties in making the concept operational, which we shall see is due more to normative than empirical issues, there is reasonable evidence in the literature to support the *hypothesis of federal culture*. It suggests that a federation coexisting with a unitary or centralist citizen culture is condemned to chronic instability, institutional degradation or even failure. "No federal system works well unless you build up a supportive political culture" (Watts 2008).

However, it would be a mistake to consider attention to the cultural dimension of federalism as a "culturalist bias" that is alternative or even contrary to new positive political economy studies and neo-institutionalism. On the contrary, from Riker (1964) to Ostrom (1991) to Weingast (1995, 1997 2005), loyalty to the various levels of government, and not just to the federation or the States, is considered crucial to the stability of federal systems. Specifically, citizens must share a similar perspective regarding the transgression of power – whether *encroachment* by the union, or *shirking* by the states. This catalyst activates the mechanism of democratic and federal reaction by the citizenry and shifts the 'federal problem' from institutions to beliefs. "The question then becomes… what combination of beliefs about the nature of transgressions can be supported in equilibrium? ...and which equilibrium will occur depends on the diversity of beliefs about transgressions and about citizen duties…Indeed, we can suggest which equilibrium will result if we know the pattern of beliefs in a society" (Weingast 1995a: 14). In sum, a key *self-enforcing mechanism* (Weingast & Figueiredo 2005) for the proper functioning of federal systems is for the citizenry to embrace a "shared belief system" (Weingast 1995b: 456) regarding what constitutes intolerable excess by the various levels of government in the fulfillment of their competencies.

In the *Federalist Papers* 51, Madison identified citizen judgment as the main mechanism for federal control: "A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government". The fully institutional controls of the Constitution, the separation of powers and the judicial branch were considered as "auxiliary precautions". Over time, his conviction became even stronger: "Public opinion sets bounds to every government" (Madison 1791 (1999)).

Effective popular control depends on the existence of "shared understandings" (Ostrom), a "shared belief system" (Weingast) or "*preconceptions partagées*" (Watts), that establish the threshold for what would be considered opportunism or exceeding the limits at different levels of government, based on a generalized citizen perception of the attributions and responsibilities of each level. Thus, "agreement on a threshold" (Bednar 2009) of what is federally tolerable is a sub-product of the identification of citizens with the federation as a whole and not with the federal government or state governments separately (Cairns 1999). Consequently, "popular safeguards - made possible through a consensus one might call federal culture - are a means to preventing socially harmful adjustments… Development of a federal culture, where popular safeguards may be activated, transforms the federal state into a federal nation" (Bednar 2009: 191).

2.- The federal principle and the quest for meaning

In *The Federal Principle* (1978), Rufus Davis highlighted how the particular normative density of the *provision of meaning* in federalism was derived from the foundational idea of *covenant*. We should highlight that if political culture is a set of unconscious or practical *values, beliefs and attitudes (tastes, habits, dispositions, capacities)* that are shared by the citizens and provide political meaning to institutions and actions, then the decisive conscious dimension of *the political ideal*, or the "federal creed", which is closely connected with the cultural dimension, is fundamental to the world of meaning in federalism. In other words, federalism is understood as "the recommendation and (sometimes) the active promotion of support of federation" (Burgess 2006: 2). Politics is an unending struggle for the hegemony of one vision of society over others and the federalist agenda constitutes a fundamental factor in at least two ways: 1) it provides a *criterion for normative judgment*, a specific ideological position from which to evaluate and critique reality; and 2) it also provides a *horizon of expectations*, a ranking of objectives and the strategies and processes to be followed in order to achieve them.

However, if federalism is an ideal, a set of values and attitudes or *an ideology and a political movement* from a perspective of political action and mobilization, then a shared federal political culture among citizens becomes both the source and interactive result of a *normative political theory*. It establishes values and attitudes that are congruent with a federal culture and the provision of coherence, articulating and transferring them from political opinions to systematic propositions that are internally consistent and allow an objective verifiable discussion. It is a mistake to separate *political ideology and theory*,

since the former often constitutes the vehicle for normative reflection (Freeden 1996). It is equally a mistake to separate the other two interpretative dimensions of politics: it is hardly possible for citizens to have a shared federal political culture without an ideology that infuses a movement, extends federal beliefs and values to the broader citizenry and clearly competes in the public sphere with other political agendas such as state or anti-state nationalisms. Without this, there is no chance of a federation in the mid-range: federal culture is not an automatic reflection of federal institutions and must be cultivated and promoted in its full normative density among the citizens. "The federal polity relies on certain shared preconceptions, values, beliefs and interests that as a whole pre-suppose policies of recognition, cooperation, compromise and accommodation. The federal polity thus extracts the essence of the notions of human dignity, tolerance, respect, reciprocity and consent" (Michael Burgess 2006).

Federal culture is the empirical-normative axis of this treatment, and requires at least two initial comments regarding the concept of 'political culture'. First, as a common identity forged by a "shared belief system" (Weingast) and "*preconceptions partagées*" (Watts), federal political culture goes beyond Almond and Verba's classical definition of "the pattern of individual attitudes and orientations towards politics among members of a political system" (Almond & Verba 1966: 23). The concept of political culture should be extended to the set of inter-subjective semiotic practices (Wedeen 2002: 713) that provide meaning as an emerging property that is anchored in political meaning. Beyond 'civic culture', political culture can be seen as a complex set of narratives, interpretations, metaphors, myths and symbols that link political beliefs with action, giving meaning to the entire political world with its institutions and behaviors. Political culture is thus a web of significance, a set of "public and shared meanings" and not merely a "collection of discrete traits whose integration is presumed" (Ross 2009: 137). In addition to values and attitudes, political culture should be understood to include narratives, discourses, interpretations and visions of the world that configure shared identities. As such, political culture shows a decisive multiple efficacy (Ross 2009) in the construction of the complex, symbolic, multi-level and *inclusive symbolic landscape* of federalism. It is founded on self-rule plus shared rule and the conciliation of unity with diversity, by: 1) framing the political context, 2) linking individual and collective identities, 3) defining borders and the patterns of interaction among groups, 4) providing interpretative criteria for the actions and motives of others, 5) offering resources and repertoires for organization and mobilization.

A certain element of confusion must be cleared up when defining a shared federal political culture, which in no way implies overestimating consensus and forgetting the inescapable dimension of conflict and political pluralism. We find that "meanings are open to various and changing interpretations, while also sometimes appearing to be overly coherent, fixed or inevitable … attention to dynamism, risk, misunderstandings, ambiguity and historical encounter calls for an analysis of the effects of semiotic practices" (Wedeen 2002: 722). By expanding the concept of political culture we extend the research agenda for federal political culture beyond quantitative studies that explore individual attitudes and pre-dispositions such as appropriate attribution of responsibilities in multi-level governments, distribution of power between different governments, tolerance towards linguistic pluralism, etc (Kincaid 2011). New research areas must be incorporated to include myths, symbols, metaphors, rhetoric, rituals and narratives as well as their role in configuring a landscape of self-government with shared government and of overlapping collective identities.

In this sense, the concept of "culture as an equilibrium" proposed by Laitin and Weingast shows its full analytical capacity for describing how the consensus that is crystallized in culturally constructed loyalties to the federation as a whole facilitates the popular control of federalism. The possibility of positive and negative incentives generating clear expectations and foreseeable behavior, along with the possibility of sanctions for unilateral failure to comply with the pact and the production of a collective identity based on cooperative, tolerant and mutually respectful us/them distinctions ties in perfectly with a concept of culture that is elaborated from a nucleus of "common knowledge". This provides "an equilibrium in a well-defined set of circumstances in which members of a cultural group, through shared symbols, ritual practices, and high levels of interaction, are able to condition their behavior on common knowledge beliefs about the behavior of all members of the group" (Laitin & Weingast 2006: 16).

Stepping again 'outside the box' of classical empirical studies in political science, political culture consists of a set of values and knowledge that are not only *cognitive* but also *affective and emotional* (Wedeen 2002, Ross 2009): citizen *attitudes* and pre-dispositions that reinforce and give feedback to the political system. The federal political culture is no exception to this. These dispositions, preferences and reinforcing habits, or more precisely, this *attitudinal support* for federalism provides something indispensible for developing, implementing and reforming institutions, but also for the

political community itself, the entire citizenry. In other words, attitudinal support supplies a favorable disposition, specific capacities, loyalty and *affective connections*.

Before addressing federal values, we must briefly pause to examine this last *affective-attitudinal dimension* of the moral psychology of federalism. The dominant neo-institutional and rational choice analyses (including the 'limited rationality' approach), which unilaterally emphasize *interests and strategic rationality* in the empirically-oriented positive theory of federalism, pay scant attention to the normative dimension of values, principles and ideals or to the specific emotions of federalism. Thus, a hyper-rationalist view of politics and federalism is taken as undisputed evidence for an institutional design of positive and negative incentives over which actors clash, armed with strategies of maximization of self-interest.

However, modern neuroscience, cognitive psychology and linguistics have conclusively demonstrated the centrality of emotions to understanding, decision-making processes and politics in its broadest sense (Máiz 2011); and emphasize the critical role of certain neuronal circuits known as mirror neurons. Narratives become decisive because they explain events and define the limits of identities in emotionally significant ways for the actors. Thus, emotions –of empathy or resentment, for example– that activate the various narratives become the explanatory mechanism in the micro-macro connection of collective action (Petersen 2002). Leaving behind all anthropological optimism and heeding the echo of the *Federalist Papers, 51*, "if men were angels…", yet an innate disposition towards coexistence, cooperation and community has *also* been found in human beings (Damasio 2005). Lakoff (2008: 118) wrote that "we are born to empathy and cooperation". When the us/them relationship is based on the natural disposition towards *empathy*, then relations of competition, self-interest and mutual distrust no longer dominate as self-evident and indisputable elements of society, and a new possibility emerges: *the political construction of trust*. This is not exclusively institutional, since it involves collective actors (political parties) as well as citizens in a political culture of shared reciprocity. It is important to highlight the affective contribution of federalism: it institutionally and culturally fosters "moral sentiments" of empathy and solidarity, extending them beyond the limitations of internal groups to ever larger circles of humanity. In any federation, an indispensable complement to shared loyalty at both the union and state levels of government is the "positive identification of citizens with each other as valued members of the same civil community". Here,

"citizenship reinforces empathy and sustains solidarity by officially defining who is eligible to be "one of us" (Cairns 1999:4).

As a political culture of reciprocity that is not only calculating and partisan, but also symmetrical and *conditionally altruist*, based on trust and mutual solidarity, federalism offers itself as an alternative to the cultivation of closed and exclusive national identities that encourage destructive passions such as hatred, resentment and anger. The very essence of the federal republican tradition resides in postulating a politics based on empathy, co-responsibility and empowering of the federal entities as an alternative to conservative politics founded on *hierarchical authority*, discipline and verticality. Benveniste (1969: 119) long ago pointed out the etymological root of federalism as deriving from the notion of agreement between equals; which in turn implies a vocabulary of sharing between *pact (foedus)* and *trust (fides)*. The *empathetic* centrality of the federal agenda is inscribed in its very origins, and as such is ultimately irreducible to explanation or interpretation strictly in terms of strategic rationality and interests.

Federalism derives its attitudinal support from democracy, which is founded on the will for agreement and the idea of *shared power and reciprocal trust*. From Althusius to Montesquieu (with his "*république fédérative*" as a "*societé de sociétés*" in Book IX of *L'Esprit des Lois*) to Madison, the psycho-social and ethical-political core of federalism continues to be the coexistence of several states within one state (the union) and of several communities within a broader political community. In other words, federalism considers the pluralist model of *mutuality*, coexistence, cooperation, empathy and trust to be psychologically and ethically-politically superior to the unitarian, coercive and hierarchical model of a nation-state that is internally exclusive and externally competitive or even openly militarized. In federalism, superimposed loyalties and identities link citizens to political power both as separate individuals and as members of communities and nations.

The false belief that political passions are the exclusive realm of nationalisms must be laid to rest. Passions are present in all political movements, each of which fosters a set of specific and inseparable *reasons and emotions*. *Federal political passions* cultivate civic attitudes of empathy, mutual respect and fraternal solidarity. This dimension of *federal political emotions* is neither removed from nor opposed to the rationality of collective interests, but rather complements and re-channels them. It is founded on the natural human capacity to forge common ground based on *mutual* respect and loyalty; a constitutive reciprocity that makes federal loyalty irreducible to centralizing

formulations of *Bundestreue* or "loyalty to the political community" flowing vertically and uni-directionally from the federated units towards the union.

This key emotive aspect, this psycho-affective tissue of federalism must not be forgotten in the hyper-rationalist approach lest we risk completely amputating the empathetic dimension of the federal vision itself. We now know that the dispassionate view of the political mind is indefensible, since the "political brain is an emotional brain" (Westen 2007: 12), and that emotions are decisive for cognitive evaluation. They constitute one of the basic human capacities and are decisively "ethical and sociopolitical" (Nussbaum 2001: 149). Ignoring the emotive dimension of the political production of trust by institutions, actors and political culture implies abandoning an essential aspect of the very *interpretative frame* of the democratic-federal tradition. Without frames or specific vocabulary it is difficult, if not impossible, to speak and even think politically. George Lakoff, a well-known cognitive linguist, was insightful in this: "it is decisive to recognize when the interpretative frames for important convictions have been lost in the public conscience and when we lack the necessary words. Our task then is to build that frame and assign names in order to be able to speak of the problem openly" (Lakoff 2008:133).

3. *Shared understandings of federalism*

The very rich, axiological and cognitive dimension of federal political culture, the values and unique perspective it defends, lead us to revisit a classical concept of political science. We can speak of a specific *mobilization of bias* (Schattscheider 1960) in a federalist key, or a *federal bias* (Wildavsky), that emphasizes the decisive function of *values* in politics, in contrast with unilateral attention to *interests*. Mobilization of this federal bias postulates values that are very distinct from those of a centralist version of politics or unitary nation-state. The first of these values is clearly *shared power,* which inherently implies overcoming the idea, image or metaphor of *sovereignty.*

From Althussius to Kant to Cattaneo to Spinelli, the federal tradition originated and was carried forward historically as an *ideal of peace* among peoples ('perpetual peace' according Kant's federalist writings). Its two tightly-intertwined key tenets can be described as: 1) going beyond the mere absence of war to a just political order involving respect, equality and the coexistence of different peoples; and 2) completely relinquishing a sovereign solution, a chimerical and ultimately authoritarian 'World State' and seeking instead to construct a "free republic of federated peoples" or a

"federation of peoples". In the same theoretical-political movement to reject the sovereign model of a World State, Kant establishes the cultural, religious and linguistic diversity of humanity as the foundation of the "federation of peoples" (Máiz 2011: 263). Friedrich (1968) pointed out in a classical study that federal political culture leaves aside the vocabulary of sovereignty, which focuses on the necessary existence of a single, originating and monopolizing center of political power. In contrast, the federal approach of shared power is *poly-centric*, a thoroughly multi-centric system of government composed of various spheres of decision-making and control. It is more than just multi-level, since there are no higher and lower orders. The federal culture replaces the vertical, hierarchical, pyramidal view of the state with more *horizontal,* diverse and autonomous spheres of *competencies* that are coordinated (federated) for the exercise of political power.

3.1. From sovereignty to multi-centric governance

It is important to draw attention to the idea that *federal political culture is intransitive*; which brings out a fundamental conceptual difference between federalism and sovereignty. The vocabulary of sovereignty is indebted to a *transitive* view of political power that assumes an ultimate, original, external, superior and pre-eminent source over other subordinate entities. Federalism, in contrast, articulates an *intransitive* understanding of shared power between the union and the states, between the various decision making and power spheres and the respective citizens, which is *derived from* and inherently *limited by* a constitution and by competencies.

The federal culture is anti-Weberian in its *non-hierarchical coordination*, as opposed to 'command and control' from a supposedly superior center. The political culture of federalism assumes that the dimensions of many issues in a globalized world go beyond pre-established and exclusive borders of competencies and seeks to ensure effective, inter-competency solutions that avoid recourse to re-centralization (Bolleyer & Börzel 2010: 231).

The federal political-legal culture is one of a *constitutional state with no sovereign*, which assumes that power is distributed in several spheres and limited under a constitution of the federation and the constitutions of the member states. The principle of *competency*, which replaces that of *hierarchy*, leaves no place for any unlimited or original power of the union or the member states. This again connects the cultural dimension of federalism with normative theory: in contrast with a *unitary* (*demos*)

constituent power possessing a single constitution, federalism offers the pluralist (*demoi*) theory of popular sovereignty. Nicolaidis calls this *Demoicracy*, a perspective that involves *composite, complex* constituent power(s) and constitution(s). It creates a new vocabulary: composite constitution, multi-level constitution, *Verfassungsverbund*, etc. By postulating shared and derived powers, federalism acknowledges the presence of *plural and shared constituent power* between several (co)constituent subjects: the people of the federation and the singular peoples of each community or federated state.

Federal political culture is horizontal. To the horizontal separation of powers between the legislative, judicial and executive branches, a federal union provides an additional *horizontal* separation of constituent and constituted powers, making it a 'state' of states. Elazar (1987: 37) proposed the image of a *matrix* for thinking about federalism outside the classical vertical structure of a hierarchical pyramid of powers.

Here again the federal culture "produces things with words". Performative language cooperates in building a series of democratizing, complex scenarios of self-government involving superimposed and multi-level citizen loyalties that require the political wealth of party sub-systems for articulating differentiated preferences. It even envisions the possibility of varying intensities of citizen preferences, based on their participation in general, regional or local elections. In sum, it houses the concept of multiple "democracy laboratories", with greater and more diversified capacity for problem solving, experimentation and innovation, along with additional incentives for mobilization and action. Because it is politically decentralized, the language of federalism must be capable of autonomous adaptation to the uncertainty, changing contexts and new conditions of contemporary society.

In the best republican tradition, an essential feature of federal political culture is the greater political inclusion of groups and territories in decision-making processes. Federalism offers a discourse of accessibility to diverse scenarios of political participation. It also tends towards more complex and effective accountability both in public policies and in institutional solutions to issues of citizen equality and well-being.

A federal political culture is by definition *adaptive*, indebted to the principle of agreements between communities for achieving common projects in the midst of rapidly changing citizen preferences and socio-economic contexts. So it can never be culturally represented as an institutionally crystallized and permanent *structure*. Rather, an open *process* is the outcome that corresponds to the combination of limited and shared power, multi-centric governance and pacts. The attitudes and values of the federal

political culture sustain the necessary but insufficient interpretative conditions for a contingent and indeterminate *process of federalization.* It is in essence an agreement and interaction between institutional actors, and as such can never be 'closed'. Successive states of equilibrium result from the benefits of self-government and the challenges of changing internal and external contexts. Elazar very appropriately describes federalism as a "*permanent* seminar on governance".

The federal political culture is clearly distinguished from a unitary centralist culture in its *articulation of self-government and shared government*. The essence of federalism lies beyond unilateralism (in favor of the union or the member states) in the conciliation of the deepest capacity for political autonomy with the greatest participative inclusion in a shared project of common government. This gives rise to the *unstable equilibrium* of federalism, which requires both institutional or party-system solutions and the support of a shared federal political culture among citizens. The attitudes and values of the federal culture reinforce the dual federal dilemma: 1) how to keep the central government from undermining federalism through encroachment on the *self-government* of the federated states; and 2) how to avoid destabilization of the federation by the federated states through disloyalty, opportunism and non-cooperation in *shared governance*.

The federal political culture remains aloof from the vocabulary of the nation-state or of nationalism against the nation-state, both of which have inherited the same underlying *monist and state-centric* assumptions. The federal perspective perceives the principle of nationalities as a smaller-scale, mimetic reproduction of the uniform, centralizing processes proposed and executed under the driving principles of the nation-state. Even the vocabulary of self-determination, when interpreted as a *unilateral* decision, has a residual place in the moral psychology of federalism, which drinks from the well of beliefs and attitudes that place highest value on political bilateral/multilateral coexistence and mutual respect.

So the federal culture clothes itself with a project of shared diversity, a common project to create a "state of states" that ultimately overcomes the traditional, *monist* logic of the Nation-state (Karmis & Maclure 2001, Gagnon 2007, Máiz 2011). This multi-centric culture of shared power spills over state 'dams' and flows towards supra-state spheres. It also flows towards local spheres, since federalism is *municipalist* by vocation and tradition, in contrast with neo-centralist state or anti-state nationalism. The strongest normative impulse of political Europeanism was and is federalist.

This multi-level, bottom-up, 'smaller is better' aspect that starts with the spheres closest to the citizen is central to the federal culture and ideal. Wildavsky (1998: 17) actually considers *the federal bias* ("a bias towards federalism") to be *the* bias, the quintessential federal normative assumption. In the classic words of Sundquist and Davis, federal politics consists of "deferring increasingly to local judgments" (Sundquist & Davis 1969: 250).

This leads us to a possible understanding of federalism as *governance*. Ultimately, as Beaud (2007) pointed out, federalism is a radical departure from the hierarchical state-centric approach. *Thinking federally* implies an interpretation of democratic politics that is open to decision-making interdependence between governments and a broader constellation of public and private actors. Rather than control or coercion from a higher command center, it involves thinking in terms of *non-hierarchical coordination* and attention to *increasingly complex contexts* of decision-making and objectives in a globalized world. It also requires a perspective that values *processes* over structures, ongoing adaptation of roles and responsibilities between government spheres in response to changing circumstances and new citizen preferences. In sum, federal thinking abandons an elitist and technocratic logic of public *management* to embrace a broadly inclusive, deliberative, democratic logic of *politics* in which public and private actors participate.

The ambivalent, complex and also enlightening concept of *multi-centric governance* coincides with the federal political culture and has been addressed by several authors (Nicoliadis & House 2001, Bolleyer & Börzel 2010, Clarke 2010). Literature on governance emphasizes several features that serve as bridges to the political culture of federalism, some of which are obvious and others problematic. These features include: *multiplicity of public and private actors* involved in decision-making processes at different levels; *interdependence* of actors, resources and decisions; the imperative of *coordination* rather than control for achieving common objectives; *horizontality* rather than hierarchy; permanent *learning* processes and re-formulation of problems with a better understanding of complex, fragmented, inter-dependent and risky contexts; processes of interactive negotiation and decision making; *formal and informal political production of trust*; similar results from different processes; connections between *formal and informal processes*; an appreciation of *power as* allowing multiple winners *via a positive sum* rather than seeing power as a zero sum (winner/loser) equation; shared leadership and respect for self-government, or *a non-hierarchical coordination*

of leadership rather than domination or control; and the construction of *networks* of public and private actors on various scales and levels.

Federalism was historically born to reinforce rather than weaken the government of the federated units and has always been concerned with emerging processes of re-centralization. Federalism must never lose sight of its founding principles, which involve the representative, deliberative and participative aspects of republican democracy: namely guaranteed and substantive self-government for the member states, strong citizenry and political control (including *accountability* and *responsiveness*) (Wleizen & Soroka 2011). Therefore, the convergence of the political cultures of federalism and governance displays some clear limitations. This can be seen in the blurring of borders between what is public and what is private and the consequent privatization of public decision-making and resources, which is characteristic of a now frequent neo-liberal understanding of governance. It is also evident in: an undisguised tendency towards hyper-consensualism in the idea of governance, which excludes conflict and covers over the political tension between choices; the weakening of political responsibility for decisions and public policies (the central weakness of all multi-centric government involves *who* is responsible for *what* and how to control it); the weakening of democratic representation and deliberation mechanisms and actors; or information asymmetries and subsequent problems with legitimation.

It is difficult to address these questions by equating the political cultures of governance and federalism. Perhaps it would be more effective to address them as an updated response to the question with which we began: what kind of federalism are we referring to? This would require a re-examination of federalism that retains the axis of its normative tradition, but re-interprets it in light of the current trend towards new patterns of horizontal government. In this sense, governance with its rhetorical images of networks, coordination and new and shared types of leadership can provide great assistance in renovating federalism and articulating a new federal vision capable of addressing the challenges of the 21st century. We now know that metaphors, along with interpretative frames and rhetoric, are a fundamental element of the conflict between alternative political ideals and vocabularies (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Lakoff 2008). With this knowledge comes the need to move beyond such outdated metaphors as Grodzins' (1960) 'cakes' (is federalism more like a *marble cake* or the ordered hierarchy of a *layer cake?*); or Elazar's (1994) 'mosaic' of relatively isolated

communities; or Taylor's (1992) description of 'separate' communities in the theory of multiculturalism.

While remaining attentive to the precautions and limitations mentioned, the metaphors of governance can shed new light on the multi-centric and reticular aspects of federalism, which are not limited to state contexts. The political-cultural tradition of federalism speaks of plural empowerment or *proactive subsidiarity*, which can apply to local and neo-municipalist contexts as well as networks of cities, supra-state, European or inter-regional spheres (especially border regions).

3.2. A non-nationalist idea of nation

The federal political culture values and reinforces citizen attitudes, fostering self- and shared government as well as cultural and national *unity in diversity*. The federal political culture involves a vocabulary and perspective of the *idea of nation* that is distant from nationalism. Similarly, and just as radically, federalism overcomes the vocabulary of sovereignty and state centrism, generating diverse decision-making centers and shared powers. Its political culture possesses a pluralist identity component that includes the nation as a core and unrenounceable dimension of its program. Federalism also proposes an interpretative frame that radically departs from the 19th century *state equals nation* equation; in which it is implicitly or explicitly assumed that each State must have only one Nation or that each Nation in this inexorable logic must possess its own independent State.

In terms of political capacities, *the federal political culture is a culture that empowers citizens for a plurality of narratives and interpretations.* Cognitively, federalism argues both pluralistically and/or pluri-nationally for the ultimate ethical-political superiority of accommodating. Beyond its tactical use as a 'stage' or 'phase', and more than just 'pacifying', accommodating involves consensus around a common project of coexistence, and the mutually beneficial cultural-political and economic enriching of several nations within a single political unit. Federalism also overcomes community *monism* and recognizes the profound moral significance of the national identities that provide a cultural context by which citizens access and participate in politics. This supplies an alternative of accommodation and recognition, in contrast with the theses and languages of communitarianism or nationalism (exclusion by an us/them dialectic, unilateral right to self-determination, secession).

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By postulating 'unity in diversity' with a perspective and language that is distant from state or anti-state nationalisms, plurinational federalism can provide a sphere for negotiation and pacts with multiple winners (understood here as recipients of material, political, cultural or moral benefits). This sphere of coexistence is much more attractive than monist federalism, confederation or secession; which can be much more costly, conflictive, impoverishing or simply unfeasible in cultural, political, social and economic terms.

The federal culture democratically socializes citizens in a pluralism of identity, culture and territory as an unavoidable *fact* and a true ethical-political *value*. It is a living, collective trust and heritage in progress that requires building and defining by everyone, much more than the mere preserving of something handed down. The culture of federalism starts with the assumption that *diversity unites and differences bring together*, interpreted through the lenses of tolerance, empathy and mutual recognition.

Plurinational federalist culture does not use a vocabulary of *authenticity*, purity and faithfulness to a tradition; it does not rely on a defensive reification of identities into a single orthodox narrative, nor does it forge them as essentialist, closed and exclusive. It does not isolate different communities and in sum *does not carry forward a mosaic-like multi-communitarianism*. Rather, it articulates multiple narratives as democratic processes of participation, internal diversity and deliberation that have been re-oriented to avoid eroding their differences while facilitating multiple memberships and making them compatible and super-imposable. Federalism does not contemplate the sacralization of historically given identities that were permanently crystallized at a point in the past. Its normative axis is not reduced to passive recognition of an organic, cultural or historic base for its constitutive units. Rather, it builds on external *and internal* pluralism in each community, focusing on the production and extension of values that comprehend a vision in flux, to establish democratically generated collective identities based on pluralism, respect, trust and deliberation. In sum, the federal political culture provides understanding that reaches beyond statist and nationalist monism; it values and democratizes nation-building processes in the difficult but very attractive shared diversity of a community of communities, a nation of nations.

3.3. Biomimesis and equality

Precisely because federalism postulates a complex synthesis of shared and self government as well as unity in diversity, it does not eradicate the inevitable political

dimension of *conflict*; nor does it cling to angelical belief in a reconciled, tension-free society or earthly 'communion of the saints'. Federalism creates an agonistic culture that Ricoeur referred to as a *conflictive consensus*. "Federalism is about conflict … Federalism is also about cooperation, that is, the terms and conditions under which conflict is limited" (Wildavsky 1998 (1976): 17). In fact, federalism entirely departs from the 19th century metaphor of *organic nationalism*, the exorbitant demand that society be conceived as a perfectly sutured and coherent organic totality. The federal ideal instead might be considered along the lines of a *political ecosystem*: a plural 'union' in which heterogeneous and even partially contradictory elements coexist in unstable but mutually beneficial and enriching equilibrium. The history of federalist vocabulary hearkens back to ancient natural philosophy rooted in the '*foedera natura*' of Lucretius in *De Rerum Natura*.

Along these lines, biology and the theory of evolution provide very useful heuristic models for re-formulating the federal hypothesis. The perspective of *biomimesis* ('nature knows best'), replaces the obsolete, mechanical, classical enlightenment imagery of 'mechanisms', 'checks' and 'balances'; offering instead new images of federative institutional development inspired by nature: symbiosis, endosymbiosis, colony, diversification and cooperation between various organisms (Benyus 2002*)*. It is not by chance that ecological political theory –which has always been rather decentralized and multi-level– and students of environmental public policies have in their most recent works rejected a 'command and control' perspective for one of multi-centric and network governance. Ecology has abandoned some initial centralist and authoritarian temptations regarding a world government that would manage risk. Each of these currents has gone on to defend new forms of decentralization and federalism that are better adapted to complex scenarios and diverse spatial configurations, ranging from the local sphere to integration of public policies to long-term thinking and cultural pluralism (Benson & Jordan 2008, O'Riordan 2009, Adger, Lorenzoni & O'Brien 2009). In climate change policies, for example, the emphasis has shifted away from inefficient top-down models for addressing global warming (Kyoto) and efforts are now based more on a multi-scalar perspective that adapts to varying and specific risks in diverse communities and from these local and regional basis constructs a 'global federalism of climate policy' (Prins & Rayner 2007). This creates a promising but little-explored nexus between federalist political culture and the new environmental culture of decentralized management and multi-level sustainability.

Finally, the feature of *equality* in federal political culture is often overlooked in the literature or even portrayed as incompatible with federalism. There is a common interpretation that considers federalism to be in direct conflict with the welfare state, with equality, and with re-distribution. In this line of thinking: a) federalism distracts from and complicates the pursuit of distribution and equality objectives; or b) federalism debilitates national trust and solidarity, which is the basis for the solidarity between various communities; or c) federalism mistakenly "acculturates" the material issues of economic and class inequality. New empirical evidence now seriously questions these assumptions by demonstrating how plurinational federalism does not erode welfare states but helps diminish differences between communities. There is no negative correlation between cultural heterogeneity and re-distribution, which has been found to depend on other factors (Banting & Kymlicka 2006). The same can be said for decentralization and equality of income (Beramendi 2003).

Even in the sphere of beliefs and attitudes that we are addressing here, it is important to highlight the centrality of equality as a value in the program and political culture of federalism. The federal political culture is one of shared diversity and, though federalism and uniformity are mutually exclusive, federalism defends a common project of coexistence that requires *equality, cohesion and solidarity*. Thus federalism defends self-government, difference, plurality of responses and policies of differentiated preferences and contexts. Moreover, inter-territorial solidarity is based on an empathy that generates common bonds and an equitable community of communities. The *re-distribution* of economic resources is a basic element in re-negotiating the equilibrium and common commitment that sustains the federation, which in turn facilitates the development of self-government and cohesion according to universal criteria of solidarity between different communities. As a community of communities and not just a poli-centric political system (sometimes erroneously referred to as a 'state of states') federalism defends the core values of equality, solidarity, and a steadfast egalitarian vocation between territories as foundational to an equitative collective project. Since it is founded on political diversity, federal equality is an *equality of opportunities, not results* (Wildavsky 1998). There is a pertinent, substantive connection between this egalitarian dimension of federal political culture and the recent debates of contemporary normative theory regarding the equality of *what* (resources, opportunities, capacities) (Sen 2009).

Federative equality is an initial equality of access to resources, an equality of opportunities that make possible the liberty, self-government and empowerment of diverse communities. It also maintains full demands for *accountability* derived from the autonomous decisions, management and public policies of each decision-making center. However, there is a minimum threshold of resources below which it is impossible to exercise the *collective capacity for self-government* that solidarity would require, regardless of the initial responsibilities defined in the autonomous policies.

The federal value of inter-territorial solidarity implies both sufficient finances for the exercise of self-government and equal fiscal co-responsibility vis-à-vis the citizens. Federalism characteristically offers co-responsibility between equality and solidarity on the one hand and empathy, respect and mutual trust on the other. Thus, the federation reinforces freedom through collective self-government, social equality, cohesion and the welfare state.

What has thus far been analyzed is inscribed in the republican-democratic tradition of self-government that is indebted to the idea of plural fraternity and solidarity and inseparably linked to equality. There are evident elective affinities between the federal ideal and a socialism for multinational societies that is able to meet the challenges of 21st century.

4. Conclusion

A robust federation requires 1) a sustainable institutional design that avoids transgression of federal power by encroachment on the states and transgression of the states on the federation by shirking; 2) decentralized party systems that allow territorially diverse aggregation of preferences and; 3) a solid federative political culture that is shared by the citizens. This cultural dimension ('shared understandings', 'shared belief system') constitutes a fundamental, reinforcing and supportive mechanism without which federations cannot endure or evolve in changing scenarios. This 'supportive political culture' undergirds the 'popular safeguard' of the citizens, based on accepted tolerable limits and the expectations of reasonable citizen and government behaviors at different levels.

The attitudinal dimension of federal political culture includes specific emotional aspects of empathy and solidarity, habits and capacity for tolerance, mutual respect and reciprocity. These are very distinct from classical authoritarian and centralistic passions such as fear and submission. The federal political culture also includes a cognitive

aspect of distinct beliefs and values (shared and self government, unity in diversity, equality, negotiation and pacts) that distances it from the unitary political culture of sovereignty based on vertical hierarchy and monist political power.

The active presence of federal values and emotions, of the interpretative frame and symbolic federal landscape in the public sphere, requires explicit cultivation and promotion; they are not established or naturally perpetuated as a mere by-product of formal federal institutions. In sum, the federation as system needs the driving energy of federalism as political movement. There is an internal and normative-conceptual connection between the sustainability of federal institutions and leadership, between organizational work and the explicit and identifiable repertoire found in the mobilization of federalist movements and ideologies. This federal culture and ideal requires interaction with a normative political theory of federalism that encourages federalist opinions, beliefs and narratives in coherent and systematic (and debatable) propositions. This improves the arguments and reasons that can provide guidance in evaluating and designing alternative institutions defined by autonomy, pluralism and equality. Nevertheless normative elaboration should always take place in close contact with empirical and comparative political science research and the positive political economy theory of federalism.

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