

The Development and Meaning of the Concept of Multiculturalism

LILLA BERKES

As a result of international migration, multiculturalism has become the dominant theory in the last 20-30 years in some countries of Western civilization. It was generally accepted that due to the practice of multiculturalism the different cultures can live peacefully side by side. The theory has become widely spread in the 1970s, but nowadays it is increasingly criticized; many question its ability to solve cultural problems.

In this short paper I attempt to unfold the precise meaning of the term due to a lot of uncertainty in this area. The question is especially relevant as there is a lot of discussion about the failure of multiculturalism and as it is blamed for being responsible for causing social conflicts.

Being examined as a political theory, we see that the concept can be interpreted in different ways and its boundaries are often blurred when trying to distinguish it from globalism or liberalism. In everyday language, multiculturalism is often regarded as identical to efforts to promote the integration of immigrants as well. The most widely accepted definition is generally negative: it determines what is not multiculturalism, or what can be contrasted with it. In fact, multiculturalism is a political philosophy and a social doctrine, which takes into account diversity and cultural differences, and defines itself as an alternative to assimilation. It is important to clarify that the model can only be applied in states where there are many strong communities that are able to survive and even seek it. However, it is not applicable if there are many immigrants from different cultures, but only a few from each culture or they do not wish to keep their identity (Joseph Raz).

Keywords: multiculturalism, diversity, civilization, culture, migration

*

Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* was among the first works that drew widespread attention to the social problems arising from diversity. In accordance with his concept, we can speak of Chinese, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Orthodox, Western, Latin American and possibly African civilizations with significantly different cultural backgrounds.¹ In the 12 years since the volume was published anti-immigrant voices intensified increasingly, and most recently Angela Merkel said that multiculturalism has failed, in different cultures – in case of Germany, Turkish - masses cannot be integrated.² One thing is certain: there are parallel societies throughout Europe, especially in big cities and in their suburbs. Where many immigrants and their descendants live, a break occurs alongside ethnic, racial and religious cutoff points.³

In these countries, multiculturalism appeared as a response or solution. Historically it is quite a new concept, still searching its solid framework concerning its content and distinction from liberalism and globalism. It is best known in the Anglo-Saxon world; examples of practical implementation can be seen in Canada and Australia, but the Netherlands is also experimenting with the idea. In Hungarian philosophical, sociological and legal thinking it appeared in the second half of the 90s, but internationally also only in the 60s or the 70s.

In the post-Cold War world, global politics became multipolar and multicivilizational. Now the most important distinctions among nations are not ideological, political or economic, but cultural. Today the most important groups of states in the world consist of seven or eight major civilizations. Besides Western

1 SAMUEL P. HUNTINGTON: *A civilizációk összecsapása és a világrend átalakulása*. Európa, 1998 57-62.

2 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11559451> November 10, 2010.

3 JUTTA LIMBACH: Die Probleme der Multikulturalität. Der Schutz von Minderheiten - eine Lehre aus der Geschichte. In: <http://www.perlentaucher.de/artikel/2557.html> October 27, 2010

societies, non-Western societies assert more and more strongly their own cultural values and reject those that the West had forced upon them. As a result, now the deepest, most important and most dangerous conflicts emerge(d) between nations belonging to different cultural entities.⁴

Besides the transformation of world order another important factor to be addressed is the issue of immigration. Randall Hansen wrote that the current immigration situation is due to these three steps:

1. the arrival of migrant workers and colonial immigrants;
2. the arrival of their family members;
3. refugee flows in the 1980s, and especially after 1989.⁵

Countries that suddenly became culturally diverse effected by immigration started to face multiple issues that strained their solid social framework: frictions and hostilities between the indigenous population and migrants, minorities and immigrants, minorities and the indigenous population, and between various immigrant groups. In addition, "at the same time as the immigrant aliens, appear and search for new forms of recognition those who were already here, but were silenced by discourses of the dominant society, left behind far from the public sphere: formerly immigrated or indigenous ethnic minorities, women, and people with different sexual behaviors."⁶

The example state to the concept that Fleras and Elliott calls the "exaltation of diversity"⁷ is Canada. Initially the identity of Canadian society was built on the French and English founding nations, however, this has changed over the last thirty years, and "embarked on a way to become a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic identity".⁸ Canada has become a "multinational, multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society. (...) A multicultural society, above all, means that every Canadian can participate in society, regardless of culture, nationality or ethnic origin, religion, race or skin color."⁹ As early as in 1972, the support of preservation of culture and religion has become a constitutionally guaranteed general principle, and the adherence to these laws is supervised by a special department.

The constitutional appearance of the principle of multiculturalism fits well into the development process concerning active state intervention. This trend began with the French Revolution and continues today, of course most prominently among fundamental rights. At the development of first generation fundamental rights the most important requirement was the recess of states, however, the situation has changed radically in the twentieth century: state involvement is an essential criteria, warranty to achieve fundamental and constitutional rights, state objectives. The principle of multiculturalism is similar: it can only be realized as a result of a long process, through a program that impacts all classes and age groups of society.

In Europe the Netherlands was urged to experiment with the idea. Piet Voncken Dutch judge said at a 2002 conference that without immigration, Holland today would not be what it is.¹⁰ "Currently about one million Muslims live in the Netherlands; measures made in their interest are primarily focusing on their economic and social situation. In addition, concerning multicultural upbringing the state pays special attention to education. For example, children belonging to a minority group can learn in their native language as well besides Dutch in cities where they are present in a significant number. On state television and in regional and local media also programs are broadcasted in the mother tongue of the immigrants."¹¹

Another field of application could be Germany (or after the statement of Angela Merkel rather could have been), that after Canada, the U.S. and Great Britain is the most important migration destination. According to Jutta Limbach, the former president of the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany, the primary requirement rather should be integration, but the fact that "more than 7 million foreigners live in Germany, out of them 3,2 million are Muslims, and about 3-4000 of them are already German citizens"¹², cannot be set

4 HUNTINGTON 49-50.

5 RANDALL HANSEN: Migration to Europe since 1945: Its History and its Lessons. In: SARAH SPENCER (edit.): *The Politics of Migration: Managing Opportunity, Conflict and Change*. Blackwell Publishing 2003 25-38., 36

6 FEISCHMIDT MARGIT: Multikulturalizmus: Kultúra, identitás és politikai új diskurzusa. In: FEISCHMIDT Margit: *Multikulturalizmus..* Budapest: Osiris Láthatatlan Kollégium 1997 7-28., 7.

7 AUGIE FLERAS – JEAN LEONARD ELLIOTT: A multikulturalizmus Kanadában: A sokféleség felmagasztalása. In: FEISCHMIDT Margit: *Multikulturalizmus*. Budapest: Osiris Láthatatlan Kollégium 1997 29-38., 29.

8 FLERAS, ELLIOTT, 1997. 33.

9 MÉSZÁROS MARGIT: Nemzeti sokszínűség – multietnicitás – multikulturalitás. Egy biztonságosabb Európa felé. *Kutatási füzetek* 6. 49-50.

10 PIET VONCKEN: Statement Niederlande. In: KALUS STERN (szerk.): *Zeitgemäßes Zuwanderungs- und Asylrecht – ein Problem der Industriestaaten*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2003 172-177., 172

11 MAJTÉNYI BALÁZS: *A nemzetállam új ruhája*. Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 2007 33-34.

12 JUTTA LIMBACH: Die Probleme der Multikulturalität. Der Schutz von Minderheiten - eine Lehre aus der Geschichte. In: <http://www.perlentaucher.de/artikel/2557.html> November 7, 2010.

aside. The language, culture and religion of immigrants are tolerated, but not protected. Protection can be guaranteed mostly in an individualistic way, basically with the use of liberties like religious freedom.¹³ Actually, in reality Germany rather sought the implementation of this proposal, namely tried to integrate foreigners, and this was the policy that failed, not multiculturalism, the realization of which, in my opinion, they never tried.

For this former statement to be supported we must look at what does the term multiculturalism mean. The most widely accepted definition is usually negative: in this sense it means diversity as opposed to sameness, difference as opposed to unity.¹⁴ It is a cultural and political platform for various principles, concepts and guidelines, with the aim of promoting the fair and equal appearance of all cultural groups in public and private institutional environment and of creating a balance between races or languages.^{15,16} Multiculturalism provides a political framework for social equality and cultural differences as for substantial elements of social order. Offers strategic guiding principles to rethink, redefine and resolve racial and ethnic differences. It considers all ethnic and cultural groups equal.¹⁷ Claims that every individual has the right to associate and identify with the culture of their choice, and yet fully benefit from the opportunities of economic and social equality. No cultural entity has the right to be privileged over another, moreover, since they enrich society, all of them should be respected and supported.¹⁸ However, its boundaries with globalism or liberalism are often blurred.

When trying to distinguish it from globalization, the most remarkable delimiting factor is the result itself: meanwhile globalization homogenizes, multiculturalism, on the contrary, recognizes and emphasizes the differences.

"Inherently, modernity is a globalizing effect"¹⁹, and this effect has increased since the 1970s both in its scope and scale, accelerating homogenization processes.

Stuart Hall makes three observations concerning the impact of globalization on cultural identities:

- National identities fall apart as a result of the growth of cultural homogeneity and global postmodernity.
- National and other local or particular identities become stronger in opposition to the effects of globalization.
- National identities are weakening, but new, hybrid identities take their place.²⁰

The most common trend is the first from the above statements. Hall defines the global postmodern phenomenon as a situation in which globalization leads to the crash of all strong cultural identities, and results in temporariness, impermanence, instantaneity, difference and cultural pluralism.²¹ At some point the examined term mixes with the concept of globalism, which can be explained by the fact that as a result of globalism not only homogenizing, but - paradoxically - heterogenizing processes are taking place as well. The latter, however - in my opinion – is not an immanent element of globalization, but rather occurs as a response to it.

"Globalization seeks to homogenize people, and to achieve this goal, media is an excellent tool; but at the same time through this publicity a cultural heterogenization is happening as well: previously unknown cultures appear and ask for recognition, and more and more people seek to differ from others."²² At this point the author contradicts himself, because he himself sees that the appearance of cultural pluralism is more an effect than a feature. Indeed, there is a link between the two concepts, namely, that multiculturalism emerged as a counterpoint to globalization efforts and its formation was also effected by the fear of homogenization. To put it differently, multiculturalism realizes (or could realize) itself utilizing the tools of globalization (media). Thus, the reason of the concept's formation is twofold: firstly the failure of applied integration policies, secondly the response induced by globalism's homogenizing effect contributes to it. As it is now

13 LIMBACH, 2010.

14 DOUGLAS HARTMANN-JOSEPH GERTEIS: Dealing with Diversity: Mapping Multiculturalism in Sociological Terms. *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Jun., 2005), 218-240., 219.

15 STEVEN C. ROACH: *Cultural Autonomy, Minority Rights and Globalization*. Ashgate 2005 36.

16 J. A. LAPONCE: The Protection of Minorities. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960, 1.

17 V. Seymour WILSON: The Tapestry Vision of Canadian Multiculturalism. *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Dec., 1993) 645-669., 654.

18 FLERAS, ELLIOTT, 1997. 29.

19 GIDDENS: *Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press 1990 63.

20 STUART HALL: A kulturális identitásról In: FEISCHMIDT Margit: *Multikulturalizmus*. Budapest: Osiris Látthatatlan Kollégium 1997 60-85., 62.

21 HALL, 1997. 78.

22 FEISCHMIDT, 1997. 28.

obvious that homogeneous nation-states cannot be created and nationalist politics based on this idea have failed, the fact of cultural diversity and potential conflicts caused by it should be treated with a different solution. Globalization on one hand strengthened population movement for economic purposes, on the other hand achieved the planet-encompassing information flow system, whereby previously unknown cultures are known now. Although, for economic reasons the aim was homogenization, knowledge gained this way contributed to the upsurge of anti-globalism, and one achievement of this was multiculturalism. This way the objective came to be diversity and its equal recognition and proper respect, and not merging or becoming average.

The relationship of multiculturalism and liberalism is very different from the above-mentioned. According to Raz, so far liberalism responded with three kinds of answers to problems arising from social differences. The first he calls tolerance, that doesn't treat minorities differently until they get into conflict with the majority culture. This usually meant that the minorities were restricted in the use of public spaces and the media, and that their activities had to be financed from their own resources. The second response emphasizes individual rights contrary to ethnic, religious, gender and sexual orientation-based discrimination. This solution goes way beyond tolerance, gives some control over particular rights: members of the minority can no longer be excluded from schools, living environment, workplace etc. The third liberal approach is multiculturalism that can be applied in states where numerous solid cultural communities live together and they are able to survive and even seek it. Does not apply, however, where there are many immigrants from different cultures, but only a few from each culture, or they do not want to keep their identity.²³ "The political community, the state, if multicultural, consists of different communities and is owned by none. The relative size of various communities will effect disputes over resources and the allocation of public spaces, however, no community should be allowed to see the state as their own, or think that others depend on their patience."²⁴

Charles Taylor points out that the idea of liberalism is the political empowerment of dominant cultures, so it inherently suppresses other cultures considered less significant. "Liberalism is not a possible meeting point for all cultures, but a political expression of a group of cultures, and as such is incompatible with other cultures."²⁵ In contrast, multiculturalism proclaims equivalence of different cultures, makes no distinction between them and most importantly does not indicate a dominant culture. "Multiculturalism views as crucial that the citizen would be primarily loyal to society, but tolerates and supports secondary loyalties entitled to other specific legacies, as this is part of the citizen's 'package'."²⁶ Above all, the authors Fleras and Elliott highlight another important distinguishing factor: liberalism is individualist, while multiculturalism primarily requires loyalty to society, that clearly comes from the aim of preventing intercultural conflicts. Individualistic liberalism is especially devastating for cultures other than the majority or dominant culture.²⁷

Overall, we can say that there are two relevant aspects of multiculturalism. On the one hand it may be considered in inherently diverse states with indigenous minorities, such as Hungary, Romania, Russia. In these cases, some minority laws (could) contain warranty provisions to ensure the exercise of their rights. The other dimension is relevant in states that are traditionally immigrant countries, thus where the number of immigrants is high, such as France, the Netherlands, Germany, or even the USA. The essential difference between these two areas is that the minorities were socialized in the country's culture: they went there to school, speak the language and know the local customs. The same cannot be said about immigrants. Established in a place other than their country of origin they break away from their roots, get out from their safe environment and this impacts them as a frustration. In addition, the unemployment rate is high among them. A Somali refugee with only primary education who does not speak Hungarian is rarely employed in a senior position. In both cases, the existence of strong communities that insist on the survival and recognition of their culture is an important condition.

The ideology of multiculturalism is the most recent solution to the problems of minority groups with listening to them and respecting their habits. Therefore it does not seek to integrate them into society, but to maintain the diversity they represent, and through this makes people of different cultures loyal to the given state. Its purpose is twofold: to prevent frictions, and on the other hand to economically exploit this diversity.

23 JOSEPH RAZ: Multikulturalizmus – liberális szempontból In: FEISCHMIDT Margit: *Multikulturalizmus*. Budapest: Osiris Láthatatlan Kollégium 1997 173-189., 175.

24 RAZ, 1997.

25 CHARLES TAYLOR: Az elismerés politikája FEISCHMIDT Margit: *Multikulturalizmus*. Budapest: Osiris Láthatatlan Kollégium 1997 124-152., 145.

26 FLERAS, ELLIOTT, 1997. 36.

27 VERNON VAN DYKE: The Individual, the State and Ethnic Communities in Political Theory, *World Politics*, April 1977 365.

The realization of all this requires an active contribution both from the state and society. As this is an ideology, the actual implementation is a time-consuming task, since it cannot be forced on people. The state should guarantee a legislative framework, which can take place at the level of a constitution that stresses the valuable nature of various cultures, or on other regulatory levels that support the implementation of non-discrimination and the actual "practicing" of the culture. Social changes can be achieved by increasing tolerance through widespread information that affects all age groups.

Obviously not everyone is in full support of this concept, which provides an opportunity to demonstrate potential disadvantages as well.

Radtko, representing a kind of cynical view points out that one of the unintended consequences of multiculturalism could be the pluralism of origins and that solidarity might be replaced with withdrawal to the authenticity of cultural identity. He mentions as an example the USA with "black tables in college cafeterias", "Asian blocks", or separate holidays for different races - and all of these are demanded by the interested minorities as "celebration of differences".²⁸

Gergely Egedy, seeking a conservative standpoint says that national cultures must be firmly protected since this is the best way to resist the pressure of globalization that threatens cultural uniqueness. He draws attention to the phenomenon that groups interested in globalization also support multiculturalism promising greater social equality and global prosperity, but in return they ask for remission of national cultures that are much more dangerous to them than subcultures. In his opinion, conservatives can never go into this deal without sacrificing their principles.²⁹

It is worthwhile to stress again the earlier quoted position of Taylor who pointed out during his research on factors influencing value judgments that paradoxically the claiming of positive value judgments homogenize, because criteria used for this is the criteria of the North-Atlantic civilization, and thus unspeakably and implicitly, the judgments will force the others into our category. So if we judge all civilizations and cultures based on our own values, the politics of diversity ultimately will make everyone similar.³⁰

According to some views, in many aspects multiculturalism shows resemblance to communism. Although economic equality was not achieved, we can talk about the equality of cultures. It became a Europe-wide tendency that a number of far-leftist activists are connected to a variety of anti-racist movements - there are examples for it in Hungary as well. The Western left benefits from the dissatisfied and often unemployed immigrant masses as they replace well the vacuum left by the proletariat.³¹ "The left uses immigrants to destroy traditional Judeo-Christian values in a demographically weakened Europe infected by anti-Semitism. Multiculturalism in Europe became a basis for anti-Semitism, anti-Americanism, fanatic enthusiasm for the Palestinians, moral relativism and loss of identity. It is present in universities where teachers and students engage in a cultural jihad against Western values."³² At this point I would note that the principle idea of multiculturalism is the equivalence of cultures. Given the fact that the Jewish and the American people have a culture as well, I do not see the ideological soundness of why they represent an exception. Multiculturalism came into existence exactly because some cultures were oppressed, assimilated, integrated, but these policies have failed. The primary purpose of the concept is also related to the fact that integration policies have not been able to deal with conflicts - however, according to advocates of multiculturalism if cultures receive equal recognition such conflicts can be prevented. If Jews or Americans are in need of protection, it protects their culture. So the basic thesis is right, the analogy with communism is remarkable, but the conclusion is definitely incorrect. It is true that there are some negative attitudes against the representatives of the mentioned cultures, but this is not the fault or consequence of multiculturalism.

Many people oppose the implementation of the idea claiming that Europe cannot be compared with the U.S. or Canada, and they worry about the European civilization in fear of immigrants. In their view behind the concept lies the relativism of values and not the pluralism of values, and enchanted by multiculturalism one cannot represent an opinion on moral issues.

The main arguments of critics are the following:

- multiculturalism eliminates the legitimacy of national culture-based political institutions;

28 FRANK-OLAF RADTKE: Az idegenség konstrukciója a multikulturalizmus diskurzusában. In: *Multikulturalizmus* 39-46., 45.

29 EGEDY GERGELY: (Multi)kultúra – konzervatív olvasatban. In: www.magyaraszemle.hu/szamok/2001/2/multi_kultura October 27, 2010.

30 TAYLOR, 1997. 150-151.

31 A valódi dzsihad – Európa nem veszi észre, merre halad. *SZOMBAT*. Zsidó politikai és kulturális folyóirat.

November 10, 2010.. http://www.szombat.org/ujhirek/0713_avalodidzsihadeuropanemveszieszremerrehalad_1.html

32 BAT YEOR see: www.szombat.org/.

- in the spirit of multiculturalism they take away from the majority of society the culture that their sense of togetherness is based on;
- multiculturalism confuses identities, educates people to have "multi-identity", or rather no identity - and these people can easily be manipulated;
- they play minority cultures off against national cultures;
- only national cultures can resist the harmful effects of globalization;
- not all cultures are equally good and valuable.³³

The question can be approached in a way that multiculturalism increases the vulnerability of European nation-states, endangers the stability of European political systems by stimulating migration, through this increases unemployment, crime and social unrest; enables fundamentalist groups to strengthen their influence on society; and provides opportunities to terrorist groups to operate in target countries.³⁴

During the study of assimilation György Schöpflin arrived to the conclusion that states over-simplified this issue, since after World War II there were hardly any groups without some sense of ethnic identity. In Europe, immigrants were simply identified as non-whites, and their socio-economic situation was ignored. They were expected to integrate to society as mature, independent citizens, but the newcomers were peasants coming from a pre-modern rural environment to the ultra-modern urban milieu and did not give up their rural values immediately. Since the left became an advocate of multiculturalism, assimilation was left to be a right-wing issue. However, with the rejection of assimilation the left put itself into an uncomfortable situation: they took away the chance of assimilation from non-whites. In other words, multiculturalism and this way the left over-simplifies the issue: non-whites are inherently unable to assimilate, so there is no need to provide them this opportunity.³⁵

Over the past 20 years multiculturalism has been a controversial issue. Initial assimilation efforts did not work out because it was impossible to merge the culturally distinct arriving masses into western culture, but at the same time integration concepts have failed too since during an integration process the host community itself is changing as well. Thus the process is two-way, however - and this is particularly true in Europe - in many places the majority have not considered this possibility and the minority did not want to become part of the majority either. Then, rejecting the previous two methods, appeared the idea of multiculturalism and proclaimed that all communities are equal and should be given the same respect, because the state is owned by both of the communities and none can expropriate it. Consequently, the same rights have to be granted to them. However, presently this solution method is in crisis as well, even the example state, Canada is trying to prevent further immigration, and many are saying that they would protect the culture of the majority from minority cultures, and clearly the concept of multiculturalism is unable to deal with these voices. At the same time in the 21st century seclusion is not an option anymore, further immigration cannot be prevented, and the masses already present cannot be ignored or their rights cannot be restricted. Multiculturalism has not failed yet, but it must adapt to the changing circumstances.

Translated by Judit A. Kantor

*

<http://www.southeast-europe.org>
dke@southeast-europe.org

© DKE 2010/4.

Attention! Dear Researcher! If you are to refer on this essay, or about to quote part of it, please be as kind as to send an email with a request to the Editor in Chief to the following email address: dke@southeast-europe.org

Please refer to this essay as the following:

Lilla Berkes: The Development and Meaning of the Concept of Multiculturalism. (Translated by Judit A. Kantor)
Délkelet-Európa – South-East Europe International Relations Quarterly, Vol. 1. No. 4.(Winter 2010) 6 p.

Your cooperation is highly appreciated. *The Editor in Chief*

33 MÉSZÁROS, 51.

34 MÉSZÁROS, 52.

35 SCHÖPFLIN GYÖRGY: Ráció, identitás és hatalom. In: *Regio*. Kisebbség, politika, társadalom. 1998/2. 9-10.