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MULTICULTURALISM: DEAD OR NEVER FULLY PRACTICED?

INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, many analysts and statesmen in Europe and elsewhere proclaimed that policies of multiculturalism have failed and the concept is now dead. This paper argues that, contrary to such proclamations, it is too early to call for the funeral of multiculturalism, as it has never been fully practiced especially in Europe. The paper outlines the three requirements for a full multiculturalism namely 1) the existence and recognition of multiple cultural groups within the society as a factual case, 2) the acceptance of the moral equality of those cultures, and 3) the affirmation of multiple cultural groups. The paper concludes that multicultural policies failed because these three requirements, particularly the moral equality of cultures, have not been practiced all together.

CALLS FOR THE FUNERAL

Beginning with the turn of the twenty-first century there occurred frequent critics of the policies of multiculturalism in Europe and elsewhere so that many politicians and statesmen, even scholars, publicly proclaimed the death of multiculturalism. One can easily see the increase in such calls after the 9/11 attacks, bombing incidents and shootings in major European cities such as London, Madrid and Paris. The assassination of the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn and the consequent arguments about the so-called “home-grown” terrorism further increased the demands for the abandonment of multicultural policies.

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On 16 October 2010, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel told a gathering of younger members of her conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party that “the approach [to build] a multicultural [society] and to live side-by-side and to enjoy each other... has failed, utterly failed.”¹ Her comments followed the proclamation by Horst Seehofer, the leader of the CDU’s Bavarian sister party, the CSU, that the concept “‘multikulti’ is dead”. A year later, in his speech on radicalisation and terrorism at the Munich Security Conference, the British Premier David Cameron similarly concluded that multiculturalism in Britain has failed to provide a vision of society in which members of all ethnic groups feel they want to belong.² The French President Nicolas Sarkozy quickly joined his allies “burying multiculturalism”. He declared that multiculturalism failed and it left the young Muslims especially in Britain vulnerable to radicalism.³ More recently, during a private meeting in July 2018, the Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok has been reported have said that the peaceful multicultural societies do not exist.⁴ No need to extend the list of such proclamations.

Criticisms against multiculturalism have been made not only in every day politics and popular debates. Scholars and academics from very early on criticised the idea and policy of multiculturalism. One of the early critique came from the Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey arguing that multiculturalism threatened to transform Australia into a ‘cluster of tribes’.⁵ Some twenty years later, the late historian John Hirst agreed with Blainey in saying that multiculturalism was a perilous concept on which to build a national policy.⁶ Many scholars from the late Samuel Huntington in the United States to Paul Cliteur in the Netherlands objected the idea and policy of multiculturalism. British Political Scientist Brian Barry systematically attacked multiculturalism from a liberal egalitarian perspective.⁷

¹ See www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11559451 (accessed in February 2019)

² See <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-12371994> (accessed in February 2019)

³ See Tom Heneghan, “Sarkozy joins allies burying multiculturalism”, in www.reuters.com/article/us-france-sarkozy-multiculturalism-idUSTRE71A4UP20110211 (accessed in February 2019)

⁴ See <https://www.rt.com/news/433645-dutch-fm-multicultural-societies/> (accessed in February 2019)

⁵ Geoffrey Blainey, *All for Australia* (North Ryde, NSW: Methuen Haynes, 1984)

⁶ John Hirst, *Sense and Nonsense in Australian History* (Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda, 2005).

⁷ The literature on multiculturalism and its so-called rise and decline is quite vast. For some exemplary works, see Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001); Rita Chin, *The Crisis of*

The impact of such criticisms of and proclamations against multiculturalism has indeed become effective upon public policies. Increasingly we see a reversal of policies, which were in line with the idea of multiculturalism. Tougher immigration policies, emphasis upon basic national identities and European/Western values, the ban on some cultural and religious symbols like the veil ban are now common place practices in Europe, United States and Australia. Perhaps, the most symbolic of these reversals was that, in January 2007, the Australian government removed the word “multicultural” from the name of the “Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs”, changing its name to the “Department of Immigration and Citizenship”.

The debate about multiculturalism and criticisms against it obviously has to do with rising nationalist and racist movements; attacks both by so-called external and “home-grown” terrorists, populist parties, economic crises, increasing migration and refugees, and so on. When one closely examines critiques of multiculturalism, both popular and academic, they seem to run on the following lines: First, multiculturalism led to the flood of migrants into Western societies. Secondly, the multicultural policies did not assure the integration of the new comers into the mainstream society so that different social groups began to live “side by side” rather than “together”. Thirdly, multiculturalism was not a remedy to the radicalization of the youngsters and thus consequently leading to violent/terrorist attacks by them. Finally, it is thus concluded that multiculturalism does not constitute a basis for a peaceful society. Before taking the issue with these arguments, we need to have a quick recapture of what is meant by multiculturalism and the requirements for a full multiculturalism.

MULTICULTURALISM: NOT JUST A FACTUAL CASE, BUT ALSO AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

The concept multiculturalism has two distinct but related meanings in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: First it means “the characteristics of a multicultural society”, and secondly it refers to “the policy or process whereby the distinctive identities of the cultural groups within such a society are

Multiculturalism in Europe: A History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Gerard Delanty, *Community*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2010); Bhikhu C. Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); and Steven Vertovec and Susanne Wessendorf, eds, *The Multiculturalism Backlash: European Discourses, Policies and Practices* (London: Routledge, 2010).

maintained or supported”. As seen the first meaning refers to a factual situation where more than one cultural grouping exist in a society. The second meaning on the other hand points out a deliberate conscious policy or process or the idea for such processes and policies. In this sense, multiculturalism involves approval and an affirmative action so that the distinctive identities of multiple cultural groups within the society are supported and maintained. Indeed, the second usage now appears to be much more prevalent in both every day and academic usages. It is generally understood as the totality of ideas, policies and processes for the purpose of supporting and maintaining cultural diversity and groupings within the society. Multiculturalism is thus considered as the framework for the peaceful coexistence of multiple groups in a society.

According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word multiculturalism first appeared in a 1957 report on the foreign language program of the Modern Language Association in the United States. Edward A. Medina, New Mexico’s director of elementary education and supervisor of Spanish argued that the key to successful peaceful living in New Mexico, whose people were of Indian, Spanish, and Anglo descent, was multilingualism and richness of multiculturalism. As seen, in this first usage by Medina both the factual and policy meanings of the term were included. The term multiculturalism became popular in the 1970s. The 1971 declaration by the Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau that Canada would adopt policies of multiculturalism paved the way for the implementation of public legal policies. In 1982, multiculturalism was recognized in the section 27 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as it stipulated that the rights and freedoms in the Charter would be interpreted in a manner consistent with the spirit of multiculturalism. Canadian Multiculturalism Act was then enacted in 1985. The Act recognizes the multicultural heritage of Canada and commands that this heritage must be protected. It also recognizes the equality rights irrespective of race and religion, and the rights of communities to enjoy their cultures. The Act requires the Canadian government to promote and support the distinct cultures of the communities.⁸

From the 1970s onwards, we see that some other governments such as United Kingdom, Australia, Sweden, United States and the Netherlands began to adopt the idea of multiculturalism and introduce practical or legal policies. Even if the idea of multiculturalism was not given constitutional recognition and explicit multiculturalist policies were not legally instigated

⁸ See <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-18.7/page-1.html#docCont> (accessed in February 2019)

as the case in Canada, such policies were practically implemented. Multiculturalist policies included such practices as the recognition of the communal identity and language, language education, observance of religious rituals and symbols, extension of public funds to communities, positive discriminations to minority communities in public and private sectors and so on. As already mentioned criticism against the idea of multiculturalism began in the 1980s and by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century it amounted to a widespread backlash. Hence the calls for the funeral of multiculturalism.

In the beginning, I made the point that it was too early to declare the death of multiculturalism as it was never fully practiced. Before I take the issue with these funeral calls, the three requirements a full multiculturalism need to be explained. The first requirement of a full multiculturalism is the existence and recognition of multiple cultural groups within the society. If a society consists of only one cultural group, in other words, if it is monocultural, then of course there is no need for multiculturalism. It is now almost impossible to find any society with a single cultural grouping as a result of the increasing inter-societal and inter-continental movements and migrations of human beings due to speedy technologies of transportation and communication, or political and economical factors or for other reasons. This is the case for such small island countries like Malta or relatively far away countries like Japan. Again, if the factual existence of multiple cultural groupings within a society is denied and all those groups are defined in terms of one culture such as French or Turkish, then, it does not make sense to speak of multiculturalism. Hence, it can fairly be concluded that, for multiculturalism, the factual existence of multiple cultural groups are not enough, besides this, their cultural distinctiveness must be recognized.

The second requirement for a full multiculturalism is the acceptance of the moral equality of multiple cultural groups within the society. Of course there are differences among cultural groups, say, in terms of population size, locality, welfare, etc. They are morally equal in the sense that one particular cultural group within a society is not superior to, or more valuable and respectable, more civilized and better approvable than, another one. Whether it is ethnically, or religiously, or territorially, or politically, or philosophically defined, and in whatever way it is formed, each cultural group emerges and develops in the course of history as a result of the mutual interaction of various objective and subjective factors. Each cultural group thus acquires its distinctive characteristics. No doubt, the historical encounter and exchanges among different cultural groups may lead to the formation of some common features among them. Even, some cultural groups may disappear from

history. Yet, as long as we identify and speak of multiple cultural groups, they retain some degree of distinctiveness. The historical formation of multiple cultural groups and their distinctive identities is beyond the scope of this paper. What we can surely say is that we have no objective and commonly acceptable criteria to determine the primacy and supremacy of one particular group over the other. In other words, the statement of primacy and supremacy by one group over another one is just a subjective claim and can easily be countered with a similar claim. If there are no commonly acceptable and objective criteria to put one culture over and in front another one, then, we must accept their moral equality. For instance, being a Turk and Muslim should be considered morally equal to being a German and Christian. For the peaceful coexistence of multiple cultural groupings within a society, it is thus a must to recognize and accept their moral equality; so that they conceive themselves equally valuable.

The third requirement of a full multiculturalism is the affirmation of the multiple cultural groupings within a society. For the peaceful coexistence of different groups within a society, it is not just enough to accept the factual existence of those groups and to recognize their moral equality in abstract sense. In addition, multiple cultural groups need to be approved as something good beyond simple acceptance and toleration. Moreover, there must be a positive environment and policies through which each cultural group is able to enjoy and promote its own culture without any discrimination, as long as they do not intervene in each other. Actually, the third requirement is a logical consequence of the second one. If there is no such thing as the affirmative action *vis-à-vis* a particular group, it is indeed the implicit recognition of the priority or superiority of another one. Similarly, if there will not be a positive environment for cultures, then, there is no point in recognizing their moral equality.

The satisfaction of these three requirements, especially the second one and also the third one, is not that easy. Although these requirements seem to be fulfilled to some extent in those countries, which are relatively successful in implementing multiculturalism such as Canada, Australia, the Netherlands Sweden, United Kingdom and United States; it is hardly possible to say that they have been fully satisfied. There has always been an implicit, if not explicit, perception of “dominant” or “primary” cultural group, a legacy and going on consequence of nationalism. In most cases, the multiple cultural groups, especially so-called ‘minorities’ have been tolerated rather than positively approved. Even the distinction between “majority” versus “minority” reflects that the moral equality is not fully recognized. Who is “major” and who is “minor”? If it is just a reference to arithmetical size,

then, what is the point of measurement? Even Canada, the most successful country in implementing multiculturalism both legally and in practice, has some shortcomings from the point of a full multiculturalism. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act refers to “ethno-cultural minority communities”, through which the English and French were not definitely meant. Again, the Act mentions preservation and enhancement of the use of languages other than English and French, thus English and French have been singled out. Although multiculturalism has been constitutionally recognized and significant affirmative policies of multiculturalism have been implemented in Canada, the full recognition of the moral equality of all cultures seem to be a bit missing. The satisfaction of the three requirements of a full multiculturalism may be rather hard as shown by the Canadian experience, the most successful example of multiculturalism. That is why I have initially said that multiculturalism was never fully practiced. However, the highly successful Canadian experience also shows us that it is not impossible. Having explained what I mean by full multiculturalism, I shall now take the issue with the critics.

FALLACY OF THE CRITICS

The first point of the critiques of multiculturalism is the flood of migrants into the western societies. This argument cannot be considered as a valid criticism on two accounts. First and easy reply is what is wrong with migration and migrants? Of course, this needs a lengthy discussion but it suffices to say that immigrants throughout history significantly contributed to the societies in which they settled. Secondly, policies of multiculturalism have not historically been the reasons behind migration, but multiculturalism emerged after migrations and immigrants. Multicultural societies were multicultural long before the idea and policies of multiculturalism. Here the fallacy of the critics is that they confuse the cause and effect.

The second point raised is the argument that multiculturalism did not result in the integration of the new comers into the mainstream society or the mutual integration of multiple cultural groups, so that the different culture groups within societies now live “side by side” rather than “together”. This is indeed perhaps the most significant objection and was voiced by Blainey very early on. At a first glance, this argument appears to have some validity as we today have cultural ghettos, even no-go areas, in some major cities. However this point ignores the significant degree of integration among multiple cultural groups as indicated by, for instance, mix marriages. In addition, there is no conclusive proof that multiculturalist policies caused this “side by side” living. Indeed, in those countries where people complain

about lack of integration such as France and Germany, multiculturalism is not legally established but denied, and not many significant policies of multiculturalism in practice have been implemented. In other words, pace Mr. Sarkozy and Mrs. Merkel, France and Germany have never been multiculturalist countries. Finally, upon this issue of living “side by side” rather than “together”, one may ask: what is wrong with living side by side? And what is so good about living together? Moreover, are we sure that members of the same cultural group live together and not side-by-side? In the course of our lives, we experience both side-by-side existence and togetherness. This is the normal practice of human life.

The third objection to multiculturalism by the critics is that it did not prevent the radicalization of the youngsters in Western countries and thus paved the way for the so-called “home-grown” terrorism. The first thing here we must note is that most of those perpetrators of the bombing and shooting incidents in major European cities were third generation migrants. In other words, they were born and socialized in European cities and had very little of their ancestral culture. It is indeed true that we observe some degree of radicalization among youngster, not only those who come from minority groups but also those who come from the majority groups as well. However, there have not yet been significant scholarly studies showing that multiculturalism is the cause of radicalization. One can equally argue that radicalization occurs due to lack of multiculturalist policies. Of course, many other reasons such as economic crises, extremist ideologies of all kinds, socialization and upbringing, psychological disorders may be behind youngster radicalization. On this issue, what we need is more and more case-by-case studies. As the three objections of the critiques are fallacious, their conclusion that multiculturalism does not constitute a basis for a peaceful society does not hold.

CONCLUSION

As I have initially pointed out, the idea of multiculturalism emerged in the second half the twentieth century and widely understood as a key to or framework for the peaceful coexistence of multiple cultural groups within a society. The present-day backlash against multiculturalism has nothing to do with the failure or death of multiculturalism as I have shown that the arguments of the backlashes do not hold. It must here be emphasised again that the majority of the backlashes either come from those countries where multiculturalism has not been implemented, or those who are members, if not defenders, of the majority/dominant cultural groups.

Although the concept of multiculturalism is rather a new concept, the practice was ages-old. Since ancient times there had always been multicultural societies, and even if they were not named as multiculturalism or policies of multiculturalism, in various societies multiculturalism as we now call it was practiced. The Ottoman “millet system”, according to which each religo-cultural group was free to live with its own culture including its own system of law, was perhaps the most successful example. The question whether multiculturalism assures peaceful societies requires more and more case studies, especially comparative case studies between countries with and without multiculturalism. Yet, Canada, the most successful contemporary example of multiculturalism, and the Ottoman system, the most successful historical example, could be taken as a presumption for multiculturalism against non-multiculturalism.