

MULTICULTURALISM IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: CHALLENGE OR THREAT?

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An overview of the themes that dominate in the sphere of contemporary political philosophy shows a major shift in the basic area of interest. Namely, instead of the concepts of political power, basic principles of societal laws, and the problem of sovereignty so characteristic of the political thought of the first half of 20th century, the political theory that emerged in the past three decades has focused primarily on the social ideals of political community, equality, justice, and cultural freedoms (which to a great extent entails the debates and dilemmas surrounding multiculturalism) taken to be the basic values and criteria in the evaluation of political strategies and institutions emerging from them. Nevertheless, most of the contemporary political orientations systematized in the theoretical concepts of utilitarianism, liberal egalitarianism, libertarianism, Marxism, communitarianism, and feminism are to a great extent deepened and renewed thematizations of the concepts formulated in the preceding theoretical political viewpoints.

Due to this important shift in the research interests of contemporary political philosophy, this paper looks at some of the theoretical frameworks dealing with multiculturalism. Such an approach lays the foundation that would help further critically engage with some of these theories in relation to practical examples and case studies. In line with this, the major focus and inspiration for this paper stems from the frequently proposed presupposition that post-socialist and especially so ex-Yugoslavian space has shown

that any attempt to presume national homogeneity has resulted in violence and open conflict. Some of the often proposed counter examples to this are countries such as the USA, Canada, and Australia, where, it is believed, many forms of multicultural solutions have been more or less successfully embraced. It is this critical comparison that triggers the interest for this paper with special focus on Will Kymlicka's paper regarding the inapplicability of Western standards of multiculturalism on the countries of post-socialist Europe. The paper analyzes and compares anthropologically, historically, socially, and culturally the politics of cohabitation and the multicultural models employed by the countries from the region (with emphasis to former Yugoslavia) and the proposed, supposedly successful multicultural models of the above-mentioned countries. The paper is a tentative attempt to check the validity of the generally accepted belief that a variety of functional multicultural solutions can be looked for outside our own setting, especially so outside the setting of the Eastern and Central European countries (hereafter ECE), and hence, must be exported to or adopted by these states. The paper shows the neo-colonial pretension and perils of such an approach, especially for the countries that have been pressured to apply and adopt Western models of multiculturalism.

Theorizing Multiculturalism

Kymlicka's contribution in the sphere of multiculturalism debates is unquestionable. He brings a number of novelties in his

discussion of liberalism (1989) where he introduces a variety of convoluted terms such as political community, cultural membership, and collective rights and sets out to try to understand how liberals should respond to a situation of cultural plurality. He builds his argument on the presupposition that in addition to the political community composed of individuals who exercise rights and responsibilities required by the liberal justice framework, there is always and necessarily a cultural community within which people “share a culture, a language and history which defines their cultural membership” (Kymlicka 1989: 135). It is Kymlicka’s deepest conviction that liberal theory, even a traditional one, can accommodate this cultural membership. Hence his blunt question: “Why is it commonly supposed that liberals must oppose special status for minority cultures?” (1989: 137). In this sense, liberalism is seen as incapable of accommodating minority rights, and it demands equal rights of citizenship regardless of the consequences this may have for the existence of minority cultures.

Kymlicka, suggests that cultural membership has a much more important place in liberal theory than has actually been recognised. Although very little attention and significance was given to it by liberals, cultural membership, he believes, is so important that it actually represents the primary good (Kymlicka 1989: 162). While liberals stress individual autonomy, and that liberty matters because it enables each individual to actively form and revise his own life plan, Kymlicka poses the question about what is the source of people’s values: how do people form their conceptions of good life? He argues that these beliefs are rooted in the structure of the cultural communities that people belong to. (Kymlicka 1989: 65). When a person sets out to select a life plan, he/she does not start from nowhere, but instead selects from a range of options determined by his/her cultural heritage. With this presupposition, Kymlicka clearly comes closer to the communitarian arguments whereby each one of us is constrained by the actions of others and by the

social settings presupposed in their and our actions. He stands in favor of a dialectical principle reconciling the apparent incompatibility of liberalism and cultural membership. Kymlicka’s major point of reference is Canada’s aboriginal communities, which makes the applicability of his study on other regions even more difficult. Nevertheless, his emphasis on the great importance of cultural heritage can successfully be applied in our later comparison of the multicultural circumstances and models of the ECE countries, often referred to as countries in transition or post-socialist countries with the models of countries such as the USA or Australia.

What anthropological approaches find to be a very problematic issue in the multiculturalism debates, Kymlicka included, is that fact that such theories “treat the community as a universalised abstraction, one whose scale is usually not specified” (Cowan, Dembour, and Wilson 2001: 17). The radical insistence on cultural relativism within anthropology triggers major anthropological critiques of multiculturalism models, as models that presuppose that “cultures, like communities, simply exist” (2001: 18). Anthropological approaches dealing with multiculturalism are primarily concerned with questions about how and through what social and political processes culture comes to exist. This again, will throw more light on our further comparative analysis of multicultural models.

The same anthropological critique is directed to Taylor’s complex study *Multiculturalism and “The Politics of Recognition”* (1992), where he accentuates recognition as something that forges our identity in our interaction with others. He radically claims that “my own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others” (1992: 34). Taylor’s major standpoint is that of a multiculturalist who stands in favor of the recognition of distinct cultural identities. He maintains that cultural recognition is an important and necessary constituent of the value of treating individuals with equal respect. In the light of this argument, he argues that cultural recognition is important

because its “refusal can inflict damage on those who are denied it, according to a widespread modern view” (1992: 36). In accordance with this, Taylor urges us to see that to withhold recognition from others, or to even impose misrecognition, “can be a form of oppression” (1992: 36). Taylor calls on recognition of equal value, that is, the equal worth of other cultures (64), but at the same time appears to be very critical of the automatic, unquestioned assumption that non-inclusion inevitably means exclusion and that as such, it can harm and is bad. To say that a culture has equal worth, according to Taylor, is not necessarily equivalent to saying that everything in that culture should be endorsed unconditionally. While against prejudgments of cultural work, Taylor remains wary of the fact that the presumption of equal worth is often conflated with the judgement of equal worth, without there being any judgement carried out in the first place.

Challenges and Threats of Adopting Foreign Multicultural Models

Having discussed some of the major theoretical frameworks of multiculturalism, we now move to a comparative study involving critical application of some of the above-discussed theories. We take Kymlicka’s article *Multiculturalism and Minority Rights* (2002) as the major point of reference in arguing our case. It goes without saying that there are certain aspects of the existing Western multicultural models and minority rights that proved to have positive effects for the strengthening of peaceful cohabitation and tolerance within culturally diverse societies. Some of them are therefore a future challenge for the ECE countries, which are at the initial stage or in the process of developing such models. Nevertheless, it must be taken into account that in the group of paradigms of cultural values and multicultural standards that the ECE countries should (or are pressured) to adopt, there are also those that can directly jeopardize the stability, integrity, and above all, the identity of the groups living in the region. Hence there is a problem of distinguishing between segments of the Western multicultural models whose

future adoption can be a positive challenge for ECE and those that can be directly detrimental for the society, if applied.

Kymlicka (2002) correctly notices that “countries in post-communist Europe¹ have been pressured to adopt Western standards of multiculturalism and minority rights” (2002: 1) and that the respect for minority rights is a criterion that a candidate country must meet to enter the EU and NATO. This, in itself, already reveals a neo-colonial attitude on the part of the Western countries whereby the very acceptance of a candidate country in the EU is dependent upon agreeing to adopt the required multicultural standards. As Mishra and Hodge point out with regards to the meaning of post-colonialism, “it foregrounds a politics of opposition and struggle, and problematizes the key relationship between centre and periphery” (1994: 276). Neo-colonialism however, while clearly preserving and emphasizing even more the culture-periphery relationship, seems to leave very little space for the opposition and struggle, which used to be much more defined and had more breathing space in the post-colonial period. This discrepancy between the two colonial models becomes highly visible precisely in that the latter is closer to inflicting an unprecedented threat to the stability, integrity, and cultural identities of people, by imposing models that can either be an incentive for conflict among those groups or can lead to utter cultural depersonalization.

Kymlicka rightly points out that many of the assumptions, including that western multicultural standards are working well in the West itself and that they are applicable to

¹ Kymlicka repeats what is a mistaken and frequently taken for granted assumption that there was a communist Europe, and thus what followed was a post-communist Europe. Such labeling of countries as post-communist is *contradictio in adiecto* in as much as there can be no parallel existence of a politically organized unit, that is, a state and communism. In other words, where there is a state there is no communism, and vice versa. Hence, we can only speak of socialism and henceforth, post-socialist Europe.

the ECE, are controversial. His initial point of reference are the Québécois in Canada, Scots and Welsh in Britain, the Catalans and Basques in Spain, the Flemish in Belgium, the German-speaking minority in South Tyrol in Italy, and Puerto Rico in the U.S. which he defines at the level of substate/minority nationalities. A parallel could be drawn between these groups with, for instance, the Albanians in the Republic of Macedonia², although Macedonia encompasses at least seven different ethnic groups. Kymlicka emphasizes the recent shift in the attitude towards these substate nationalities from suppressing them to “accommodating them through regional autonomy and official language rights” (2002: 2). The only clear exception to this major trend in the Western attitude is France with its refusal to grant autonomy to its main substate national group in Corsica. Interestingly enough, Kymlicka does not bring into question that this shift in granting somewhat greater rights to the minorities in the above-mentioned Western

² The territory of what is today Macedonia was until 1913 the last part of the Balkans ruled by the Ottoman Empire. After 1919, Macedonia entered the Kingdom of Yugoslavia under Serbian jurisdiction and without administrative autonomy. This Kingdom was defined as a Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians, without mentioning the Macedonians. After 1945, Macedonia was constituted as the People’s Republic of Macedonia within the framework of Yugoslavia. After the break up of Yugoslavia, Macedonia was admitted to the UN on 8 April 1993 as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) until an agreement could be reached with Greece which claimed that some of the articles of the new Macedonian Constitution following the declaration of independence on 8 September 1991 made territorial claims on the Greek province of Macedonia. The issue regarding Macedonia’s name has until recently not been resolved with Turkey being the only state to recognize the country under its own constitutional name, i.e. the Republic of Macedonia. The controversies grew even larger after the very recent official U.S. recognition of Macedonia under its constitutional name. Macedonia is a land-locked country covering 26,000 km² with a population of approximately 2 million and the capital is Skopje

European countries is about granting them a very limited, administrative, or so to say, formal rather than substantial equality.

In his second example based on the case with the indigenous people from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, or the U.S., he bluntly argues that “virtually all Western states that contain indigenous peoples and substate national groups have become ‘multination’ states, recognizing the existence of ‘peoples’ and ‘nations’ within the boundaries of the state” (2002: 2). It seems that Kymlicka’s statement can rightly be considered an over-optimistic exaggeration. While the recognition of the existence of peoples and nations within the boundaries of the state may not be brought into question, one can argue that the recognition of someone’s existence does not greatly alter the status of being ignored. On the contrary, by recognizing someone’s existence, one establishes the primary foundation on which someone’s rights can be denied. While this may seem a sophist argument, following further, Kymlicka’s line of argumentation can be used to prove our case. Let us only briefly point to his statements that “land claims, customary law and self-government for indigenous people are all clearly affirmed in recent international documents” (2002: 3). It is obvious that such alleged developments in the treatment of indigenous people or substate nationalities are merely at the level of rhetoric or written documents. It would not take too long for one to realize that the real affirmation of land claims in recent documents, as Kymlicka puts it, would necessarily need to, bluntly speaking, directly lead to a position where just about anyone who is not a “full-blooded ‘Native-American’” should move out from the U.S., to use just one example.

Later on in his paper, however, Kymlicka recognizes the fact that “substate national groups do not have a *right* to multinational federalism under international law” (2002: 3). Moreover, he brings into light the fact that no international document has affirmed any principle of territorial autonomy or official language status for substate national groups despite the fact that many people in the West

view this as the best response to these groups. It is true indeed that, as Kymlicka argues, international law falls far beyond much of the multicultural practices of Western democracies. Nevertheless, it is also an omission of a key point when comparing these models to those in ECE. Namely, in all of the above-mentioned Western democracies, the immigrant nation included (as Peter Kivisto, 2002, would like to refer to the U.S.) the realization of political interests through the matrix of national or even ethnical identities is absolutely excluded. In the post-socialist countries, however, ex-Yugoslavia and/or Macedonia being great examples, national political parties fully exist. In the U.S., on the contrary, though there exists an overabundance of nations, cultures, ethnicities, no single national ethnical party exists or is permitted. Contrary to this, as previously mentioned in Macedonia for instance, the government is made up of coalition parties of Macedonians and Albanians and not of Republicans or Democrats. Such governmental structure is among other things, a requirement of the international community itself, but is nowhere practiced in the Western democracies that Kymlicka talks about. Could the reason for this be the obvious risk that such political organizing can inevitably lead to fragmentation and disintegration? Why then are we asked to practice multicultural to the level at which the western countries stop?

Moreover, even though Kymlicka's argument regarding present practices of multination federalism and official language rights in the Western democracies cannot be denied, the dissatisfaction of substate nationalism and the all-too-frequent riots and terrorist attacks in those regions, prove that most of it is at the level of formal rather than substantial federalization, as was the case in former Yugoslavia. In addition, it can easily be argued that former Yugoslav republics, now fitting within the post-socialist scheme, had far greater minority rights than the ones Kymlicka argues exist and are applied by current Western democracies. To clarify this, we should point out that the Yugoslav

Constitution of 1974 is widely believed to have been the most democratic and liberal regarding the treatment of ethnicities, guaranteeing them greater rights than they have anywhere in the Balkans today.³ The Republics were guaranteed rights of autonomy and secession. The idea of socialism as the cohesive ideological matrix of Yugoslavia integrated the people to the extent of creating the 'Yugoslav' as a nation, whereby 3.8 million people actually declared themselves to be Yugoslavs as opposed to Serb, Croat, etc. Thus, Yugoslavia bridged all WW II animosities by preserving the political ideal upon which the Ottoman Empire rested⁴,

³ This Constitution, as far as the rights it guaranteed to the nationalities were concerned, was according to many authors and lawyers, the most liberal one in Europe and even in the world. See more on this in Janjic (1987). Among other things, with that Constitution, Kosovo practically gained the status of a Republic, although it was technically constituted as an autonomous province.

⁴ That the Balkan region is imbued with tolerance existing within the Ottoman Empire system can be proved by various facts, especially with regards to architecture. As Ferid Muhić explains in his monograph on Macedonia, there are still "churches dating from the time before the Turks, as well as those, which were built during the time before the Turkish occupation or were often renovated, and financially aided by the state" (Muhić 1994: 164). An example of a financially aided church is St. Joakim Osogovski, damaged by fire in the nineteenth century, which received financial aid for reconstruction from the Government of Sultan Abdul Hamit (*ibid.*, 164). There is also no authentic historical source of Ottoman coercive conversion in the Balkans. Noel for instance (1996, 51-70), uses the term Islamicisation instead of Islamisation. He gives an example where he says that if the Osmanli Turks were ruling the Balkan region over 500 years and if the Islamicisation was coercive they would definitely convert more than 1% of the population per year, as they had all the means and power to do so. One percent is a very modest target for effecting a change of ideological regularity. So, if they were Islamicising 1% of the population per year it would mean that after 100 years of ruling they would Islamicise 100% of the whole population. Yet, even after 400 years, only 50 to 70% of the population was converted. Hence, the conversion

that is, by promoting the principle of unification of all people into one Yugoslav nation. Frightened by these denationalizing processes, the republics strengthened their disintegrative measures, such as by insisting on the use of their own languages in the federal parliament. As nationalist tendencies undermined that concept of socialism in which the identity of Yugoslavia had been forged, identity returned to national, ethnic, lingual, cultural, and religious spheres, with the result that separation became the project on which everybody became focused. Needless to say, a great mistake in the concept of former Yugoslavia, which led to its dissolution and fed the specific national, ethnic, and cultural passions was the very preservation of the separate names of the republics which clearly denoted a particular ethnicity. This brings into question even more the legitimacy of applying Western multicultural models and minority rights in post-socialist countries, where allegedly, these rights and standards were only at a rudimentary level or never existed and thus must be 'imported' from abroad.

Even if we accept the presupposition whereby the U.S. can be used as a somewhat successful model of multiculturalism, it goes without saying that this model, as well as the nation itself have emerged on the basis of suppression/elimination of the native population. All cultural immigrant communities found themselves in the same position and thus, had very little ground for establishing a hierarchical relation of the type that exists in the ECE countries, former Yugoslavia or Macedonia, to name one example. In Macedonia, there is no ethnic group or nation, irrespective of size, which cannot, by the legal standards accepted in the world at large, be considered autochthonous. "The Turks, the most recent arrivals and the smallest ethnic group [...] have lived for 600 years on Macedonian soil" (Muhić 1996: 235). They have also exercised sovereignty

was around 0.25% per year, which is an extremely low figure. The logical conclusion is that there could not have been any coercive conversion.

over Macedonia for many years. The Albanians, as Muhić further points out, have been here in the Balkans longer than any of the Slav nations. They are directly linked with the Illyrians, Trojans, Thracians, Dalmatians, and the ancient tribes of Epirus. Even if leaving Illyrians to the side, according to Muhić, they must have come earlier than the Slavs in the Balkans-about fifth century AD (1996: 236). This then creates the tension whereby for the Albanians, they are the truly autochthonous inhabitants of Macedonia. Macedonians, on the other hand are now "incontrovertibly the most numerous nation on the territory of Macedonia" (Muhić 1996: 236), which on their part has certain advantages on the basis of which they also fall into hierarchical relations.

This brief overview should help us understand that the multicultural models developed elsewhere, such as the one in the U.S., emerged from a completely different analytical and historical framework. It is therefore highly doubtful if not dangerous to try to apply these models in this region (in this case, the Balkans). Even models offered in places such as Switzerland are nonfunctional if applied in the countries from the region. Switzerland, just like the U.S. and many other countries as a matter of fact, has appropriated a name that no other group has. This in itself did not trigger the emergence of an advantaged-disadvantaged relation as it does in Macedonia, where the very name of the state refers to the majority nation. We would also like to discredit the hypothesis whereby the hatred in the post-socialist countries has been suppressed for a long time due to the totalitarian character of the socialist rule. The fall of the regime then logically resulted in the explosion of these long suppressed negative feelings. The current situation with the Flemish, Basques, Catalonians, or the case with Corsica, clearly proves that weakness of such an argument.

It is obvious then, that much of the supposedly successful models in the Western democracies or immigrant nations are functioning because they had none of the difficulties that the ECE countries have faced.

They have, moreover, emerged through completely different practices, including the elimination of indigenous peoples. It would be very difficult then to try to apply these standards in other settings that have experienced drastically different historical constellations.

Conclusion

This paper analyzed and compared anthropologically, historically, socially, and culturally the politics of cohabitation and the multicultural models employed by the countries from the region (with emphasis on the former Yugoslavia) and the proposed, supposedly successful, multicultural models of the Western democracies (as Kymlicka refers to them). We critically engaged with the generally accepted belief that a variety of functional multicultural solutions can be looked for outside our own setting, especially outside the setting of the ECE countries, and hence, must be adopted by these states. The arguments and examples used showed the neo-colonial pretension and perils of such an approach, especially for the countries that have been pressured to apply and adopt Western models of multiculturalism with special emphasis to former Yugoslavia and Macedonia. Forcing someone to accept standards of behavior, proves that today, the world enters into a worldly, planetary *international capitalism*. The contemporary states are going through the phase of liberal megacapitalism. Their legal integrity and sovereignty is at the same time their key condition for their subordination in that they ask to be admitted in this or that organization while agreeing on a list of conditions, which in the final instance, utterly relegates their sovereignty and freedom. Such is the case with ECE countries that are pressured to accept Western multicultural models and minority rights as an accession criteria for entering the EU.

As Muhić points out, the main target of the globalization processes are exactly the societies, that is, states, that maintained their cultural autonomy and that live actively through their own cultural traditions (2001:

240). This *mondalization* of the world seems to see direct opponents and victims exactly in those who preserved their cultural integrity. The main tactic of opposing them is the cultural depersonalization or alteration of the cohabitation models that stem from the specificities of their cultural, social, and historical constellations. Hence, it is interesting to see that those Western democracies that Kymlicka points to developed their multiculturalisms up to the level of their political realization, where they then must stop. As was mentioned above, the U.S., for instance, does not permit the existence of national parties, which on the contrary, exists as a model in post-socialist countries, Macedonia being just one example.

Finally, the historical complexities and the multifaceted layers of cohabitation in ECE, may prove that the practices of post-socialist countries are far more instructive for the future theoretical understanding as well as practical application of multiculturalism than those proposed and imposed by the Western democracies.

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