

MULTICULTURALISM WITHIN THE POSTCOLONIAL AND POSTCOMMUNIST FRAMEWORKS. THE CASES OF INDIA AND ROMANIA

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Abstract

Since its beginnings in the 1970's to the proclamation of its death in 2010-2011 by the most important European leaders of the time (Angela Merkel, Nicolas Sarkozy and David Cameron) to its present day reinterpretation due to increasing migration and globalization, multiculturalism has been on the agenda of policy makers worldwide. And rightly so, as a liberal multicultural society, at least in theory, "cherishes the diversity of and encourages a creative dialogue between its different cultures and their moral visions." (Lord Bhikhu Parekh, What is Multiculturalism?). This is indeed the desired (some would say utopian) perspective, but how successfully has it been implemented? As far back as 2007 Will Kymlicka was challenging his readers with two possible options: either to abandon the project of internationalizing multiculturalism (highly undesirable, in his opinion) or to rethink it and put it on a more coherent footing of liberal multiculturalism (Multicultural Odysseys). In this paper I address multiculturalism in the postcommunist and postcolonial contexts and explore possible points of intersection between the two. If, as I have shown elsewhere, the postcommunist condition is (to a certain extent) part of the postcolonial framework, I am seeking to find out whether their approaches towards multiculturalism are similar. The case studies analyzed are Romania and India and the respective states' policies towards 'nation', as well as their relations with the minorities living on their present day territories. With different historical, political, ideological and geographical backgrounds, the two countries are taken as illustrations to test the validity of liberal multiculturalism and its theoretical and practical potential.

Keywords: liberal multiculturalism, postcommunism, postcolonialism, nation, minorities

1. Introduction

In 2010 and 2011 Western European leaders claimed the failure of multiculturalism in their societies. It was not a great surprise, as there had been foreseeable signs, among which we should mention disturbances in certain districts in some Western European cities (2005 in Paris and Birmingham, 2006 in Brussels, 2007 in Val d'Oise, France, 2011 in London). Besides riots in European cities, there had been

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other previous signs of this view, as former Prime Minister of Spain, Jose Maria Aznar, had proclaimed the same thing as far back as 2007: “the multicultural experiment is a failure in Europe” (Schanzer, 2015).

In a speech at a meeting with young members of her Christian Democratic Union Party in 2010, German chancellor Angela Merkel criticised the multicultural approach. Defined as groups of people of different cultural backgrounds living side by side, Merkel proclaimed multiculturalism had “utterly failed” (*The Guardian*, 2010).

She was followed by UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, who held the same type of speech and said that “the doctrine of state multiculturalism”, which in his words encourages different cultures to lead separate lives, had failed in view of growing world terrorism. He also said that a policy of “muscular liberalism” needed to be adopted by Britain in the future, which meant enforcing the Western values of equality, law and freedom of speech throughout society: “Freedom of speech. Freedom of worship. Democracy. The rule of law. Equal rights regardless of race, sex or sexuality” (*New Statesman*, 2011). Cameron said the doctrine of state multiculturalism, defined by total separation of cultures within the state, eventually led to complete separate communities and had been a political mistake:

Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and the mainstream. We have failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We have even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run counter to our values. (New Statesman, 2011)

Finally, the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, took the same stand the same year and voiced his concerns with forging a national community, not a place where different national communities just manage to co-exist, while at the same time admitting that it is important to respect cultural differences: “We have been too concerned about the identity of the person who was arriving and not enough about the identity of the country that was receiving him” (*The Telegraph*, 2011).

But what is this multiculturalism which apparently has failed? According to Lord Bhikhu Parekh, people are defined by their culture and view the world around them in a culturally structured way, which means that all cultures deserve the same respect as they are equally rich. Moreover, each culture has an internally plural, fluid and open identity. Thus from a multicultural perspective, a [multicultural society]

not only respects its members’ rights to their culture and increases their range of choices but also cultivates their powers of self-criticism, self-determination, imagination, intellectual and moral sympathy, and contributes to their development and well-being (Parekh, What is multiculturalism?).

The members of a multicultural society are bonded together by a strong sense of belonging, forged through common interest and attachment, but there are some communities less advantaged than the mainstream. In such situations affirmative action policies should be in place to redress the situation (Parekh, *What is multiculturalism?*).

Lord Bhikhu Parekh differentiates between citizenship rights and the common sense of belonging which “is about acceptance, feeling welcome, a sense of identification”. It is this latter element which could be said to be fundamental in the above mentioned quotes by leaders of state in Western Europe proclaiming the failure of multiculturalism. For they may have mistaken legal rights for cultural rights and not taken into account the need for cultural recognition of these minority groups, which overrides their legal recognition.

In order to assess the success or the failure of multicultural policies, Will Kymlicka mentions two dimensions that need to be taken into consideration: inter-group equality and individual freedom (Kymlicka, 2007: 138). In other words we need to ask ourselves to what extent multicultural policies have managed to reduce ethnic and racial hierarchies and to ensure that ethnic and cultural diversity goes hand in hand with liberal values, human rights and civil liberties. The simple truth is, as stated by Kymlicka, that multicultural policies have been studied too little and too randomly to be able to assess their success or not. And this applies to multicultural societies with both national minorities and immigrants, i.e. both so-called “old” and “new” migrants. However, there are a few things to be concluded: where liberal multicultural policies are in place in Western countries, ethnic policies have become ‘normal’ policies, which enable the functioning of the state in terms of ‘peace, prosperity, the rule of law or democratic stability’, and also they have helped to the liberalization and democratization of such states (Kymlicka, 2007: 166).

Therefore, why the above mentioned statements by politicians, if theorists of multiculturalism are unable to give definite verdicts on the issue? One possible answer would be courting a certain type of voters, more right-wing oriented in the context of the rise of nationalistic and conservative views throughout Europe. Not surprisingly, all the above mentioned leaders are representatives of conservative parties.

2. Some theoretical considerations

In order to better understand multiculturalism, it is necessary to start from a definition of culture. In the words of Lord Bhikhu Parekh,

Culture is a historically created system of meaning and significance or ... a system of beliefs and practices in terms of which a group of human beings understand,

regulate and structure their individual and collective lives. It is a way of both understanding and organizing human life. (Parekh, 2000: 143)

Is it possible, then, to say that multiculturalism is a set of cultures living side by side within the limits of the same territorial unit? This is rather a simplistic view, but that is the view the Western leaders mentioned above referred to. Generally it is accepted that multiculturalism is a doctrine of the liberal Western intelligentsia, considered utopian by right-wing politicians, who – as quoted above – even stated its death.

Will Kymlicka is probably the best known theoretician and supporter of liberal multiculturalism and he claims there is no universally accepted definition. However he attempts one:

the view that states should not only uphold the familiar set of common civil, political and social rights of citizenship that are protected in all constitutional liberal democracies, but also adopt various group-specific rights or policies that are intended to recognize and accommodate the distinctive identities and aspirations of ethnocultural groups. (Kymlicka, 2007: 61)

Lord Parekh, however, contradicts the view that liberalism should be the basis of multiculturalism, as the latter cannot be theorized “from within the conceptual framework of any particular political doctrine”. Whereas liberalism is a powerful moral and political doctrine, and multiculturalism needs to take it into account, it is not the only one, for “To call contemporary western society liberal is not only to homogenize and oversimplify it but also to give liberals a moral and cultural monopoly of it and treat the rest as illegitimate and troublesome intruders” (Parekh, 2000: 112). Parekh also critiques the Western based conceptions of “good life” at the basis of multiculturalism (called ‘moral monisms’), as well as the view upon which individuals are passive receptacles of their cultures without influences from power relations, and the vision of culture as closed entities, homogenous communities. He also antagonizes contemporary theorists, among whom Kymlicka, for their “absolutization” of liberalism and the “universalization” of liberal values. In order to avoid these problems, Lord Parekh indicates the line of institutionalized intercultural dialogue, which is adequate for the pluralistic character of multicultural societies. Within this framework, all participants have to recognize each other as equal: “The dialogue is ... bifocal, centring both on the minority practice and the society's operative public values, both on the minority's and the wider society's way of life” (Parekh, 2000: 271).

3. Nation-states and/or multicultural liberalism

Multicultural liberalism is a reaction against and a response to the homogenous unitary nation-state model. Both India and Romania underwent a period of increased nationalism and tried to create a nation-state, in spite of obvious difficulties. Suffice it to say that both states (of course, at different levels, due to their very different sizes, territorially and population wise) have had to deal with issues of ethnicities, languages, etc.) So the question is whether both India and Romania are ready to overcome the nation state model and move on to a multicultural one.

Nation-building policies were adopted in postcommunist countries (including Romania) after the fall of communism, following the well-known pattern of the postcolonial ones (such as India). Kymlicka mentions some policies used to impose the dominant language and culture in the process; these include, among others, adoption of official language laws, construction of a nationalized system of compulsory education and of a standard curriculum, centralization of political power, diffusion of the dominant group's language and culture, or adoption of symbols of the dominant group as state symbols (Kymlicka, 2007: 62-64).

This model was eventually contested, as various substate groups started advocating a more multicultural state model. Obviously, this varies from state to state, but there are some main principles governing all. The first one is repudiation of the old state model in which one nation is central and the state is owned by it; consequently, the state is seen as equally belonging to all its citizens. Secondly, repudiation of nation-building policies and accepting that all individuals should be able to access state institutions without having to hide or deny their ethnocultural identity. Thirdly, the multicultural state should acknowledge the historic injustice done to minority groups and offer remedies. There are three main varieties of liberal multiculturalism, as mentioned by Kymlicka: multiculturalism dealing with indigenous people, (Kymlicka, 2007: 66), substate/ minority nationalisms (Kymlicka, 2007: 68), and immigrant groups (Kymlicka, 2007: 71).

Will Kymlicka also mention three key features of liberal multiculturalism: the fact that it is highly group-differentiated, or highly "targeted" (it guarantees certain generic minority rights to all ethnocultural groups and it elaborates certain targeted categories of minority rights, usually making the difference between "old" and "new" minorities, i.e. indigenous groups and immigrants (Kymlicka, 2007: 77). The second key feature addresses issues of power and resources in addition to issues of symbolic recognition or identity politics, and this is clear in Western democracies where states have moved away from old centralized models in order to enable national minorities' self-governing powers (Kymlicka, 2007: 80). Finally, the third element concerns the transformation of nation-building by liberal multiculturalism,

in the sense of encouraging minority rights in accordance with developing a strong nation state.

4. The postcommunist and postcolonial frameworks.

Multiculturalism as a possible state construction

I have demonstrated elsewhere (Marinescu, 2015) that postcommunism and postcolonialism are part of the same subaltern framework, with a certain time gap, but sharing the same elements, among which hybridity of transition, liminality (geographic, but also historic and cultural), ambiguity regarding the present (but also the past), or mimicry. I agree with Bogdan Ștefănescu, who claimed that postcommunism is a “postcolonialism otherwise” (...) rather than ‘an other postcolonialism’” (Galleron and Ștefănescu, 2012: 10), as the similitudes between them are more numerous and substantial than the differences.

I also agree with Ștefănescu in that both postcommunism and postcolonialism are part of the same framework, and thus are characterized by the same elements: “Soviet and Western colonialism are both subtypes or instances of *coloniality*, which can be seen as the overarching category or *genus*” and in that respect, they can be considered “siblings of subalternity” (Ștefănescu, 2012: 66). They both imply a certain economic exploitation, as well as a cultural colonization.

Also, both the postcommunist and postcolonial condition included a phase of constructing the nation-state, which followed most of Kymlicka’s pattern, described above. The question to be asked is whether this phase has been overcome in the particular cases of India and Romania and whether we could regard multiculturalism as a model to follow.

4.1 The double-edged sword of multiculturalism in the case of Romania

In the ‘transition’ period of postcommunist Romania, liberal multiculturalism would have seemed a very appropriate choice. However, it was not the first one. As shown above, building the nation-state was a more obvious choice in the period of confusion which followed the violent severance from the communist past in 1989. The hybrid and blurry character of the period was nevertheless emphasized by a simultaneous endeavour of the Romanian state institutions to positively respond to international organizations’ (the European Union, especially) requests to cater for substate minority groups’ rights.

So, the state that emerged after the 1989 revolution is a bipolar entity, which at the same time makes nationalistic claims in view of the centrality of its majority ethnic group – the Romanians – and also caters for the rights of national minorities within its territory. Among these there are the right to use their language in education,

public administration, the juridical system, the right to use cultural values and symbols, etc. The majority group imposes their view upon the national state, as described in the Romanian Constitution, in Art. 1: “Romania is a national, sovereign, independent state, unitary and indivisible” (my translation) (*Constituția României*, 2014). This is not the place to discuss at length the way these rights are respected *de facto*, though.

The general view is that of denial of equal rights for minorities at attitudinal level, although theoretically they are assumed by the majority. One often hears variations of the following (especially about the Hungarian minority, which is the largest in the country): “they should obey the majority rule/they should speak Romanian only, as they live in Romania/if they don’t like it here, they should go to their own country” (!). In the case of the second minority group, the Roma, the attitude somehow differs, in the sense that the majority believes they cannot benefit from any kind of cultural, educational or political rights, out of some sort of genetic disorder, a birth disability to learn. In general, the perception of the majority population is that minority groups would better stay segregated, although mingling with certain selected individuals seems possible and even acceptable.

Thus we could only refer to two recent opinion polls: in 2013 (Inscope research, 2013) the Romanian majority believes the two most important minorities they have had a bad relationship with along history are the Hungarian one (59.7%) and the Roma (58.8%), but those who knew ethnic Hungarians were more prone to think the relationship had been good (42.7%), in contrast to those who didn’t (16.6%). Most respondents were against using cultural and political symbols (e.g. the regional flag in the case of Hungarians): 54.9%.

The perception against the Roma is that they represent a group incapable of reform, therefore they need to be segregated. In a study made in 2013, it is shown that 68% of respondents believe that the Roma commit more crimes than the Romanians, while only 65 % of respondents believe the Roma should be allowed to live in Romania (Agerpress.ro, 2013).

This general view towards minority cultural groups within the territory of the Romanian state only follows naturally the former communist policy of minority integration, which also followed the pre-communist one. In his book *Cum s-a românizat România* (*How Romania became Romanian*, my translation), historian Lucian Boia demonstrated the fact that changing the structure of the population in Romania has always been a state policy. Thus, starting with the creation of the first Romanian principality (1859), continuing with the unification with Transylvania (1918), the period between the World Wars, the communist period and the postcommunist one, claims Boia, the Romanian state has managed “to imagine” (to use Benedict Anderson’s term (Anderson, 1993)) its “national identity” along the Romanian cultural group and to the detriment of its several minority groups.

Moreover, it has followed specific policies of integration, assimilation and exclusion of these minorities, so as to define itself around the centrality of its dominant ethnic group (Boia, 2015).

With the current migration crisis in Europe (taking place at the time of writing this article, September 2015), the issue of multiculturalism has been to the fore of intense academic, political and journalistic debate in Romania. This time the discussion focuses around immigrant groups rather than substate or minority ones. The general opinion in Romania at the moment is against this movement, as the majority of the population opposes their arrival on the Romanian territory one way or another (to seek asylum or just to cross the country towards Western Europe). Regarding the perception that Romanians have on recent immigrants to Europe and the possibility for them to come to Romania, 65% of respondents agree (totally or partially) that Romania should admit a certain number of immigrants, but when asked whether they would accept them in their town or region, only 46% agree and 42% disagree (IRES.com.ro)

I think the best attitude towards multiculturalism in Romania has been synthesized by Lucian Boia in his book, *Sfârșitul Occidentului?* (*The End of the Occident?*, my translation):

Multiculturalism has some virtues, but, perhaps even more risks. Cultural differences can spiritually enrich a society, but they can also provoke enmities (...) A culturally homogenous society is perhaps more dull, but also with fewer risks. Multiculturalism was not a desired project, but an imposed virtue. (Boia, 2013: 76-77, my translation)

4.2 India and affirmative action as multicultural policy

In India, after Independence, national identity was forged in opposition to the colonizer's, i.e. the English, with Bharat Mata, Mother India, the central image around which the state could be imagined. The need for such a unifying metaphor was great in this huge state, with so many ethnic, caste, class, gender, language, rural vs. urban subdivisions. As "There are as many versions of India as Indians" (Rushdie, 1984: 261), the need to create an imaginary national self to contain them all was clear.

In addition to the 'Indian nation' created in opposition to the English, there was also the need to envision a unified self for its multiple cultural and ethnic groups. Multiculturalism in India has been mostly promoted from a Marxist perspective and it includes the highly debated policies of Affirmative Action for the "Socially and Educationally Backward Classes" (which represent about half the population of India). It was meant to combat economic, educational and political inequalities among different groups and its most known policy is that of the so-called

'reservation': approximately 27 % of all government jobs and higher education places are subject to reservation policies. There is affirmative action for other categories, as about 15 percent of government jobs and higher education places are reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, who make up 20 percent of the population of India (De Zwart, 2000: 235).

As De Zwart states, these originated as an administrative category and its inventors followed social democratic and Marxist discourse. These policies are embedded in the Indian Constitution: Article 46 allows preferential treatment of 'weaker sections of the people', Article 15(4) talks of 'the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens', while Article 16(4) permits 'any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens' (De Zwart, 2000: 238). Affirmative action programmes, however, have had a long history, as they started as far back as the British rule in order to appease the non-Brahmin movement in the 1920s and 1930s (De Zwart, 2000: 243).

There have been many issues concerning these policies, among which one of the most difficult to address is the clear definition of the categories benefitting from them. De Zwart explains how the dilemma of recognition has led to numerous problems in the Indian successive governments' attempts to equal and equitable redistribution of resources. Thus, India has chosen to cope with the issue through what De Zwart calls the 'replacement' policy, which he defines as a compromise between the 'accommodation' (basically multicultural) policy and 'denial' (a policy which claims that despite inequality among groups in society there is no benefit for any specific one when applying redistribution). In the case of India, this policy has led to even higher inequality, which in their turn motivates more groups to claim benefits. Those new social categories seem to be the ones that replacement policies tried to suppress in the first place: "multiculturalist governments provide incentives for group formation along cultural lines and thereby construct what they claim to reflect. Replacement does the same, but leaves even more room for caste or ethnic leaders to influence the official category system" (De Zwart, 2005: 158). Therefore we could say such policies have variable success in India.

5. Conclusions

Postcolonialism and postcommunism are derived from the genus of coloniality, and thus partially belong to the same contemporary framework, as mentioned above. So, we could have expected India and Romania to use the same multicultural policies and to behave similarly in respect to this subject. We could say there are some elements of similitude among the two: imagining the national self in opposition to the 'other'; in the case of India, alterity was better found in the colonizer, and the image of 'Mother India' was set against that of England. For Romania there were several 'others': the Russian, as former semi-colonizers, were accompanied by the

‘other’ inside in national territory – the Hungarian, the Roma, more recently, the immigrant.

However, we could see that what separates India and Romania is from this point of view stronger than what makes them similar. When talking about multiculturalism, India adopted mainly affirmative action towards their culturally different groups, denominated in terms of oppression and discrimination, the so-called “Socially and Educationally Backward Classes”. This is mainly done through a policy of reservation of places in education and in the labour market, and it has stirred a lot of discussion and discontent among the Indian society. The Romanian attitude towards multiculturalism, both substate/minority and immigrant, seems to be undefined and hybrid still.

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