THE STATEMENT ABOUT THE RETREAT FROM MULTICULTURALISM IN EUROPE BEYOND SUPERFICIAL POLITICAL RHETORIC

Assoc. Prof. Lachezar Antonov, PhD
Department of Cultural Studies,
South-West University „Neofit Rilski"

Abstract

During the last quarter of the 20th century there was a clear trend across Western European democracies toward an increased recognition and accommodation of diversity through a range of multicultural policies and ethno-cultural and religious minority rights. Since the mid-1990s, all these multicultural policies and established measures to grant additional rights to minorities, have met with serious public and political resistance. This shift in the public attitudes (actively voiced by politicians from across the political spectrum) from tolerant multicultural acceptance of cultural diversity towards civic-integrationism and neo-assimilationism (that treat cultural diversity in a completely different way), has given rise to a phenomenon that has got the name of „the retreat from multiculturalism". The present text is dedicated to the critical reconstruction of this phenomenon and to the verification of the validity of the main claims and arguments underlying it.

Keywords: multiculturalism, neo-assimilationism, group rights, identity politics, diversity management

In the winter of 2010-2011, several high-ranking European politicians, including Chancellor Merkel, Prime Minister Cameron, and President Sarkozy, made high-profile speeches announcing that multiculturalism was dead or had 'utterly failed'.[1] The judgment pronounced on multiculturalism by those politicians received a wide public response and quickly acquired the status of a main argument in support of various anti-immigrant and anti-multiculturalist

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[1] It's about Angela Merkel's speech in Potsdam on 16 October 2010, (Guardian, 18 October 2010), 'David Cameron's speech on radicalisation and Islamic extremism, Munich, 5 February 2011', (New Statesman, 5 February 2011), and Nicolas Sarkozy's interview in TF1 channel on 10 February 2011, (Agence France Presse, 12 February 2011).

theses, without this judgment itself being satisfactorily argued by those who initially pronounced it. A critical reading of that hasty judgment, that I will try to suggest here, will show that it is deeply problematic, both theoretically and empirically. It is not based on verifiable data or authoritative research, the kind of which was not lacking in 2010, but on assumptions concerning problems of heterogeneous origin, often having nothing to do with the very multiculturalism which they are referred to.

The thesis of the paper is that the criticism of multiculturalism (as well as the concept of multiculturalism itself) is not so homogeneous and monolithic as it is often presented to us by those who wrongly believe that political statements proclaiming the failure of multiculturalism target the same issue and/or that multicultural policies lead to the same negative results wherever they have been experimented with. In my book „Multiculturalism and the Limits of Toleration" (2019) I discuss this issue in detail and suggest using a differentiated approach to the topic of failed multiculturalism, so that the situation in each country is considered separately. The advantage of this approach is that it considers both the contextual conditioning of the multicultural policies considered problematic, as well as the specifics of the political environment in which these policies are implemented.

The starting point of this paper is the critical reception of multiculturalism from the early 2000s, and, in particular, the rise of the thesis about the *retreat from multiculturalism* and the search for new types of policy approaches to managing cultural diversity. And more specifically, the new approaches that I will focus on here are the civic-integrationist and neo-assimilationist ones.

In the last three decades, we have been offered the thesis of retreating from multiculturalism, of rethinking and rehabilitating the theory of cultural assimilation (Alba & Nee, 2003; Brubaker, 2001; Gans, 1999) as an adequate alternative to the failed multiculturalism, which has encouraged social fragmentation and the emergence of the so-called ethnic enclaves and parallel societies (see Heitmeyer 1996; Meyer 2002; Halm/Sauer 2006; Schiffauer 2008).

One of the first scholars who diagnoses and analyses the processes of „retreat from multiculturalism" is the German political sociologist Christian Joppke (Joppke, 2004: 237-257). According to him, at the end of the 20th century all West European immigration countries had experienced a policy shift marked by the rejection of multiculturalism and the adoption of civic integrationism that emphasizes the importance of building and maintaining national unity rather than recognizing and accommodating cultural diversity. Joppke believes that the turn from multiculturalism (based on group-differentiated policies going beyond the limits of liberalism) to civic integration (based on a strong assertive form of liberalism) can be explained both by the lack of public support for multicultural policies and by the inherent shortcomings and failures of these policies, especially with respect to socio-economic marginalization and self-segregation of migrants (Joppke 2004: 244).

Another well-known defender of the thesis of the „retreat from multiculturalism" - Rogers Brubaker - found that the Western world in the 1980s and 1990s experienced an unprecedented flowering of multiculturalism discourse, but with reaching its limit at the end of the 1990s this development took a different direction. It was then that the first signs of what Brubaker calls „the return of assimilation" appeared.

The assimilation Brubaker talks about does not imply a pressure towards cultural homogenization, it only requires adaptation to the most general principles or core values of liberal societies. The „return" identified by him is not a return to the much-discredited assimilationist policies of the 1960s, it is a return to the idea of assimilation, but conceived in a new way, namely, as „assimilation without assimilationism" (Brubaker 2001: 539). This kind of assimilation „is opposed not to difference but to segregation, ghettoization and marginalization" (Brubaker 2001: 543), and in this sense it differs significantly from the old, hostile to difference concept of assimilation. Brubaker's thesis can be summarized as follows: at the very end of the twentieth century, we see both a retreat from the self-exhausted multiculturalist approach to diversity and an advance of a neo-assimilationist approach to it. Unlike the old assimilationist approach that assumes the virtual eradication of differences or the complete acculturation of immigrants into a homogenous social body, a neo-assimilationist approach recognizes difference-within-similarity, aiming for a direction of change, not a particular degree of similarity among immigrants to be integrated.

The first thing I find disturbing in the theses of Joppke, Brubaker and their followers is the very understanding of the „retreat from multiculturalism" as a counteraction to a problem common to all West European societies, the causes of which are the same everywhere. I think that, at least at this stage, the retreat from multiculturalism (which is still so much talked about in Europe today) is a local rather than a global phenomenon and that even where it can be really identified it has been brought about by different factors. It affects some countries more than others, it has different contextual-dependent ways of coming to light, it covers different aspects of social inclusion, integration policies and immigrant lifestyles, which vary from country to country and depend on the approaches to cultural diversity established in each country. Therefore, despite the shared rhetoric used by the multicultural sceptics all over Europe, it is difficult to discern a common target for the different attacks on multiculturalism. This is clearly visible in the 2010-2011 critical speeches of the already mentioned political leaders, who, as if in complete unison with each other, proclaimed that multiculturalism had failed, although each of them meant something different, talking about this „failure". Criticizing multiculturalism, David Cameron aimed at an overly tolerant attitude toward extremist Islam, Angela Merkel at the slow pace of Turkish integration, and Nicolas Sarkozy at Muslims who pray in the street (Bowen 2012: 18).

The legitimacy of the proclamation about the failed multiculturalism is relative, situational, fluid and changing, it depends on many contextual and

local factors. To speak of the failure of multiculturalism in general (or even to speak of multiculturalism in general, without taking into account its various dimensions[2] and polysemic nature) is a sign of a reductionist, decontextualized approach, which does not take into account that even if somewhere one or several aspects of multiculturalism did not work according to one's preconceived expectations, it/their „failure" cannot be automatically transferred to multiculturalism in general, nor can it/they be explained by the existence of the same prerequisites for it/them everywhere.

Perhaps the main question in the debate about the validity of the thesis about the *retreat from multiculturalism* is whether this thesis can be confirmed or rejected empirically. Here, I think we should turn our attention to the main source of empirical data regarding the current state and sustainability of multicultural politics in Western democracies and in particular in European ones. Such a reliable source of empirical information is the Multicultural Policy Index (MPI) developed by a research team at Queen's University in Canada under the direction of Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka (Banting & Kymlicka 2020). MPI is one of the most significant and authoritative scholarly research projects that monitors the evolution of multicultural policies across twenty-one countries with a liberal democratic form of government over the past 50 years. It takes into account the presence or absence of such policies in each of these countries in five separate periods of time – 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010 and 2020 – thus tracking the development of these policies over time. Quantitative data and qualitative assessments of policy changes are collected from policy documents, program guidelines, legislation, government news resources, and secondary sources.

MPI covers three types of minorities: immigrant groups, historic national minorities, and indigenous peoples. Regarding immigrant groups, eight policy indicators are listed[3], where the presence or absence of each policy gives a score between 0 and 1. On each indicator, countries are scored 0 (no such policy), 0.5 (partial) or 1 (clear policy). Thus, the maximum score one country can get is 8. By aggregating the scores of that range of public policy indicators representative of multiculturalism, we obtain a useful and accurate measure

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[2] In my latest book, I identify five such dimensions of multiculturalism (Antonov 2019). Some authors (Werbner 1997; Hall 2000; McLennan 2001) even go further in emphasizing the multiplicity of multiculturalism, conceptualizing it in the plural, guided by the conviction that it is more accurate to talk about *multiculturalisms*. According to the British social anthropologist Pnina Werbner „there are as many multiculturalisms as there are political arenas for collective actions" (Werbner 1997: 26).

[3] The eight indicators are: (1) constitutional, legislative or parliamentary affirmation of multiculturalism; (2) the adoption of multiculturalism in school curriculum; (3) the inclusion of ethnic representation/ sensitivity in the mandate of public media or media licensing; (4) exemptions from dress-codes, Sunday-closing legislation etc.; (5) allowing dual citizenship; (6) the funding of ethnic group organizations to support cultural activities; (7) the funding of bilingual education or mother-tongue instruction; (8) affirmative action for disadvantaged immigrant groups. (https://www.queensu.ca/mcp/immigrant-minorities)

of a nation-state's approach towards cultural diversity and a reliable information about the recognition, accommodation and support of minorities within an immigrant-receiving nation-state (See Table 1).

Table 1: Multiculturalism Policies for immigrant Minorities Summary Scores from 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, 2020

	Total score (out of 8)				
	1980	**1990**	**2000**	**2010**	**2020**
Australia	5.5	8	8	8	8
Austria	0	0	1	1.5	1.5
Belgium	1	1.5	3.5	5.5	5.5
Canada	5	6.5	7.5	7.5	7
Denmark	0	0	0	0	1
Finland	0	0	1.5	6	7
France	1	2	2	2	1.5
Germany	0	0.5	2	2.5	3
Greece	0.5	0.5	0.5	2.5	2.5
Ireland	1	1	1.5	4	4.5
Italy	0	0	1.5	1.5	1.5
Japan	0	0	0	0	0
Netherlands	2.5	3	4	2	1
New Zealand	2.5	5	5	6.5	6.5
Norway	0	0	0	3.5	4.5
Portugal	0	1	3	3.5	3.5
Spain	0	1	1	3.5	3
Sweden	3	3.5	5	7	7
Switzerland	0	0	1	1	1
United Kingdom	2.5	2.5	5	5.5	6
United States	3.5	3	3	3	3.5
AVERAGE	1.3	1.9	2.7	3.6	3.8

Source: The Multiculturalism Policy Index[4]

[4]   *The Multiculturalism Policy Index, retrieved from:* https://www.queensu.ca/mcp/sites/mcpwww/files/ uploaded_files/immigrantminorities/ImmigrantMinorities_Table1_SummaryScores_2020.pdf

What MPI shows us is quite different from what the defenders of the „retreat" thesis convince us of. I will briefly present some of the more important results from the measurement of multicultural policies for immigrant minorities provided by MPI showing the degree of divergence between these two positions. The data from 1980 show that Australia (5.5 score) and Canada (5 score) occupy the leading position, and that at that time there were still few countries in Europe with policies to support cultural diversity. The European countries with the highest indicators at that time are Sweden (with a score of 3), Great Britain and the Netherlands (with a score of 2.5). Among the countries with the lowest indicators, we can see Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Switzerland - all with 0 score. But in the last surveyed period (2020), the indicators of most European countries regarding the development of multicultural policies have risen and there are no more countries whose score is zero. Great Britain and Sweden maintain their leading position and increase their score more than twice compared to the first surveyed period. Among the countries that made the most serious progress between 1980 and 2020, we see Sweden (from 3 score in 1980 to 7 score in 2020), Finland (from 0 to 7), Great Britain (from 2.5 to 6), Belgium (1 to 5.5), Norway (0 to 4.5) and Ireland (1 to 4.5). Spain (from 1 to 3), Portugal (from 0 to 3.5), Germany (from 0 to 3) and Greece (from 0.5 to 2.5) show more modest indicators, but with the same upward trend. In Austria, Italy, Switzerland and Denmark, the trend is also upward, although this is very weakly expressed. In 2020, the score of France and Spain is slightly lower (-0.5) compared to the previous survey from 2010, nevertheless, it is higher than it was in 1980. We observe clear reversal of the upward trend only in the Netherlands after 2010, which from being a leading country in terms of the applicability of multicultural policies in the first three surveyed periods turns out to be at the bottom of the ranking in the last two periods. In the Netherlands, the decline is really noticeable - from 4 score in 2000 to 1 score in 2020, which gives us reason to talk about a real retreat from multiculturalism in this country. Nowhere else is such a retreat observed.

If we summarize the data relating to the European countries covered by the MPI, we will find that except for France and Spain (in 2020) and the Netherlands (in 2010 and 2020), nowhere else in Europe can the statement about the retreat from multiculturalism be proved empirically. All other European countries either maintain their positions from the previous surveyed period or show growth compared to it. Analysis of multicultural policies clearly reveals the resilience of multiculturalism or even its expansion. In Western Europe as a whole, the trend is invariably upward. In each of the surveyed time periods, we observe a growth compared to the previous one (Table 2). Although the Dutch case is often used as irrefutable evidence of a real retreat from multiculturalism, it does not represent the general trend in Europe. On the contrary, the general trend is towards a gradual strengthening rather than abandoning of multicultural policies.

Table 2: Multiculturalism Policies for Immigrant Minorities Summary Scores from 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, 2020

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Average score of the 16 European countries covered by the MPI	0,7	1,2	2,0	3,2	3,4

Source: The Multiculturalism Policy Index[5]

If we trust the information that MPI gives us, then we can conclude that the *retreat* thesis is often highly exaggerated and even misleading, as it attributes a Europe-wide character to phenomena and processes that, at least at this stage, have a local character - they refer only to a few European countries and cannot be attributed to European societies as a whole. This, in turn, shows us that there is a discrepancy between the political rhetoric, which in the last three decades often presents multiculturalism as an exhausted and failed experiment, and the political practice, which testifies to its sustainability and even - to the consolidation of its positions in most European societies.

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