

Multiculturalism in europe and the world politics essay



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Multiculturalism is not only an issue in Europe but also in the United States, Canada and Australia. The challenges that these countries went through and continue to go through are no different from that being experienced in Europe. Migration of individuals from all parts of the earth, and with different values and perspective, to find jobs, study or be with their loved ones has caused an increase in the number of minority groups present in Europe. Aside from the immigrants, those who claim to historically belong to the European countries due to colonization like the community of with an origin of Indo-Pakistan in Britain or the Muslims and Arabs of France, have distinctively introduced themselves to the community, and demanded equality (Allam, 2009).

Khosrokhavar (2006) has presented two levels at which multiculturalism, specifically for the Muslim community, can be evaluated: the daily life level which is caused by the cultural diversity that cannot be altered anymore, and the institutional level which involves the government, the society, and all other aspects that externally affects the individual as an institution. The daily life level that was exemplified is the distinct Muslim culture of the women wearing their veil. Muslim women have been banned in different European countries like Switzerland, Belgium, Germany and France, and legislations regarding the wearing of the veil are also being discussed in England and Holland. Such measure does not correlate to the phenomenon of multiculturalism, but the government of these European countries were forced to take into consideration the safety of the general public, especially after the bombing incident in London in September of 2005 (Khosrokhavar, 2006).

The institutional level is concerned with the effect of the legislations like that mentioned earlier to the Muslim community and to the citizens who are not directly affected by the law but are influenced in terms of how they are supposed to see or look at the people to which, the law has been addressed to. The effect of these laws such as that of banning the “ hijab” has resulted to a more closely knit Muslim community, and has been considered to be of three different classes. One that tries to properly mingle with the public, consequently, denouncing the Muslim traditions. The second which, continues to practice Muslim teachings and as a result experiences social injustice, discrimination or prejudice in their every day encounters. And the third is the group that spreads radicalization, and often giving issues that involve protests and demonstrations (Khosrokhavar, 2006).

After 1945, the official stand of European countries towards immigration included multiculturalism in Great Britain, Netherlands, and Sweden; gasterbeider or denying migrant workers of political citizenship in Germany; and assimilationism in France (Rex & Singh, 2003). Various authors offer competing definitions of the term “ multiculturalism” which according to Malik (2005) refer to both a society characterised by being ethnically diverse and the philosophy and policy approach in the management of societies. In Great Britain, the social diversity brought about by migration creates particular concerns or dilemmas needed to be addressed such as the how promoting a sense of belongingness could be reconciled with respecting plural identities and cultural differences. Though multicultural discourses are divergent, the term implies efforts conveying recognition, respect, and tolerance to various ethnicities within a specific territory (Schuster &

Solomos, 2001). On the other hand, assimilationist approaches, which place an onus on the minority ethnicities to the imaginary homogenous national British way of life, multiculturalism is founded on the distinctiveness of every ethnic group and that each is accorded the right of retaining their cultural heritage. If the groups do not experience oppression, marginalization, social exclusion, then safeguarding groups from discrimination and promoting social equality are the salient facets of multiculturalism. Undeniably, multiculturalism originated from the struggles of minority ethnic activists against workplace racism, particularly in the US and Britain (Sivanandan, 2006 as cited in Herbert, Datta, Evans, May, McIlwane, & Wils, 2006).

In this broad theoretical framework, two types of multiculturalism emerge- “weak” and “strong”. “Weak” multiculturalism denotes the understanding that there should be due recognition of cultural differences in the private domain, but should not exert on the public sphere of employment, education, market, governance, and law (Rex, 1991). The major problem with “weak” multiculturalism is that a number of institutions overlap the public and private domains. For example, education though a public institution inculcates private moral values to the studentry. In addition, public institutions do not remain neutral in relation to ethnicity concerns. In the labour market, multiculturalism leads to gender and ethnic segmentation. Another “weak” multiculturalism is the “boutique multiculturalism”, in which the ethnic groups considered the minority become what is called the “exotic other” and have not gone beyond the tokenistic festivity of “saris, somosas and steel bands” (Harris, 2001; Alibhai-Brown, 2000).

In contrast, the “strong” type of multiculturalism is being promoted by Taylor who argued that being recognised is an imperative need of human beings and therefore multiculturalism should extend mere tolerance of various cultures and must grant every individual the same amount of respect and worth in the community (Taylor, 1994). This approach of Taylor also known as “primordial” multiculturalism is an essentialised and rigid view regarding cultural identities which states that groups bear a cultural baggage passed across generations. In contrast, the “civic” type of multiculturalism recognises that dynamic and permeable natures of cultures, and pushes for intra- and inter-community dialogue. This serves as the central unifying component to the claims of Parekh (2006) that in response to the cultural diversity, multiculturalism “might welcome and cherish it [difference], make it central to its self-understanding, and respect the demands of its constituting communities” (p. 6). Using this point of view, integration proceeds in two modes (Modood, 2005). Some workers strongly and radically criticised multiculturalism; their argument is that when cultural differences and recognition are focused, power struggles and injustices are masked, specifically those that are economically related. For instance, Fraser (1995) pushed for a social justice approach which acknowledges that economic disadvantage is intertwined with cultural disrespect and that there is a need to tackle this concern by means of a concerted effort of redistributing income and recognizing individual and group differences.

In the 1980s, policies of several countries in Europe, Britain most particularly, are founded on the principle of multiculturalism such as celebrating cultural differences and extending financial support to activities

initiated by members of ethnic minority groups. These appeared to be employed in a variety of ways across sectors in society which covers education, employment, politics, social welfare, and health. Apparently, education was one area where this concept became converted into a state policy and included steps of encouraging more ethnic minority teachers to teach in schools that recognise and celebrate pluralistic cultures such as different histories and religions in the National Curriculum. In the work area, articulation of the multiculturalism ethos occurred in the 1980s by providing minority members with equal employment opportunities as with the majority groups and recently by means of “ diversity management.” By adopting these strategies, organizations cultivate an inclusive labour force, facilitate cultural understanding, and abolish racism by evaluating the individual merits of all the employees (Herbert et al. 2006).

Workers criticised these developments because they have not gone beyond the celebration of cultural diversity and neglected to discuss how social injustice and ethnic discrimination originated (Troyna & Carrington, 1990). As a result, debate grew considerably between “ multiculturalism” and “ antiracism” advocates and forced people to be biased despite having commonalties; therefore a productive dialogue is prevented (Brah, 1996). Most specifically, the “ multicultural project” critics argued that assessing people as individuals is did not successfully tackle “ institutional racism” affecting groups instead of simply individuals (Pole, 2001). The diversity management policy in the work area was also criticised for presuming the use of diversity in accumulating profit; in other words, business incentives are major motivators of racism eradication. This neglects both social and

moral motives in the prevention of racial exclusion, leaving equal business and market opportunities (Wrench & Modood, 2000). Research revealed that while a number of major industries have equal opportunities initiatives in place, few of them seriously plan to implement these plans. Despite the criticisms faced by “ multiculturalism” in the work place, very little has been documented in research regarding the experiences of ethnic minorities in both workplace and institutions (Solomos, 1999).

Then more criticisms emerged and these generally focused on ways wherein multiculturalism generates inadvertent consequences and novel problems that needed resolution. Particularly, multiculturalist policies have been greatly criticised for cultivating animosity between ethnic minorities for the purpose of competing for funds and granting and co-opting autonomy to unelected “ ethnic brokers” who stifle the interests of the youth and women deemed to be the less influential sectors of society, in the hope of becoming more unified in the community (Kundnani, 2002). Multiculturalism has also been the target in presupposing that different individuals have the same level of commitment towards their respective culture and therefore fail to identify the different positions individuals occupy; as a function of their value system, life cycle, sexuality, class, gender, and so forth (Yuval-Davis, 1999 as cited in Torres, Miron, & Inda, 1999).

After the conflicts in 2001 in the northern towns in Britain and the bombings of July 2005, the value that multiculturalism used to have was politically questioned and multiculturalism is blamed for the division and fragmentation between ethnic groups in Britain (Pfaff, 2005; Cattle, 2002). The head of the

Commission for race Equality, Trevor Phillips is the prominent figure
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associated with this argument. In 2004, Phillips made a controversial announcement that multiculturalism is facing effective decline and reaffirmed his concerns in 2005 that some areas in Britain are “sleepwalking to segregation”. Phillips (2005) as cited in Herbert et al. (2006) likewise criticised an “anything goes multiculturalism which leads to deeper division and inequality... In recent years we’ve focused far too much on the “multi” and not enough on the common culture”. The Guardian (2006) also stated that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Ruth Kelly, shared the same concerns that ethnic minorities live in isolated and segregated communities.

Looking things from this perspective, multiculturalism is regarded as a threat to the common values shared in the British society. In response to these problems, politicians have urged for greater inter-cultural contact, integration, and social cohesion. This, according to some workers is like a return to the earlier assimilation discourses, emphasizing adherence to British values – as exemplified in the endorsement of citizenship tests (Worley, 2005; Werbner, 2005). In this discourses, assimilationists see cultural barrier a key problem, instead of underlying poverty, inequalities, and racisms (Kundnani, 2002). Furthermore, the polarization discourse tended to blame members of minority ethnicities for their choice to be inward-looking and segregated. In short, the recent debates surrounding multiculturalism in Britain disregard the effect of racial exclusions in generating feelings of exclusion as well as cultural segregation (Herbert et al. 2006).

Multiculturalism, Politics and Religion

In a suburban community called Grigny in Czech Republic, both the Muslim and Christian population have agreed on a tolerant and respectful society to prevent any misunderstanding so that all individuals will be able to live according to their own norms. This peaceful inter-religion or inter-cultural relationship could have been an excellent example of multiculturalism if it had not been for the outcomes caused by the terrorist attacks in 9/11. The United States government's all out war on terrorism after the 9/11 attack generalized that all individuals from Islamic countries are terrorists, or have a very high potential of becoming extremists. This generalization has created paranoia amongst European nations because of the vast Muslim population in the region (Velisek, 2010). The alliance of Britain to the United States during the war against Saddam Hussein and Iraq, has led to the train bombing in London, as a form of protest to Britain's participation (Lappin, 2007). The Czech Republic has not experienced heavy problems in terms of the heterogeneous cultures and religions that are present in their society, but with the white racism that George W. Bush started, there seemed to be an underlying discrimination and racism that has always been present, but not yet acknowledged in the society. This prejudice, if unrecognised, will lead the heterogeneous Czech Republic society to the similar path that other European nations have experienced (Velisek, 2010).

Terrorism is the nemesis of democracy and destroys what may have been good in a multicultural environment. Terrorism creates a helpless society, where the ordinary citizens continuously fear for their lives and are no longer secure within the walls of their homes. It also renders the government

officials in a vulnerable position, where they could not let their fear be seen and would have to put up a façade that will somehow appease the ordinary citizens and bring about stability during the times where almost all political leaders are powerless. At another angle, terrorism brings about a stigma on the people who have been called “terrorists” and this stigma affects all individuals, even the innocent women and children belonging to the group. In the case of the 9/11 terrorist attack, the stigma was on the Muslim population (Mahajan, 2007).

Aside from historical colonization citizens, immigrants are also a source of the population that has brought about changes in the European community. Immigration in Europe began in the late 1900s, where decolonization happened, and the reconstruction of the economic state after the downfall brought about by World War II took place (Velisek, 2010). Europe has opened its borders freely to allow economic growth and family unification amongst other reasons, in the region. With this free movement of trade and labourers in and out of the borders of the European countries, it is inevitable that people, whether of good intent or not, cross these internal borders almost everyday. The geography of Europe, similar to that of the United States, allows the entry and exit of persons between countries, and to monitor the migration of thousands of individuals, at different entry points costs a lot, and the legislations that are formulated for the security of the government are sometimes not effective especially in areas that are difficult to reach by the law enforcers. Despite the unified efforts of the European Union to detect illegal entry of individuals, there is always a certain degree of uncertainty at which those of illegitimate intent aim to pry at (Bigo, 2009).

Immigration and integration in the society has been studied and analyzed by migration scholars to evaluate or assess the European community's capacity to accommodate migrants and their respective religions and values. Political parties have also emerged to support or pass on legislations that may or may not favour multiculturalism, and these parties each have their own supporters who believe in the same views as they have (Bale, 2008). In France, Brice Hortefeux, Minister of Immigration, Integration and Identity; expressed his concern on illegal migrants, and boasted of the French government's capacity, to determine and send these migrants back to their homes. This political move has sparked some organizations to question the free movement agreement and has been seen by some to be a failure, similar to that of the American strategy. Contrary to the ideologies Minister Hortefeux, the French government created the Pact of Immigration, which is different from that which implicitly denies the entry of immigrants into Europe. This long-term policy, which was adopted in 2008, aims to create what they referred to as "Eurosurveillance" where the entry of foreigners in the European region is controlled systematically (Bigo, 2009). The United Kingdom has a certain degree of uniqueness when it comes to the diversity of the people in its community. Britain has allowed the people to retain their culture, as long as there is a certain aspect in their lives that is somewhat "British" in nature. The "British value" policy that the New Labour government re-endorsed in 2007 to 2008 created varied reactions from the members of its community. The Catholics, who remained to stand by the teachings of the church, could not adapt to some of the British lifestyles such as abortion and adoption by homosexual couples. However, despite the contradicting traditions, the British public law is more coherent with <https://assignbuster.com/multiculturalism-in-europe-and-the-world-politics-essay/>

Christianity compared to that of the Sharia law of the Muslims. But most Muslim women appreciate the British law because their rights as individuals are considered compared to the Muslim tradition that women are second-class individuals and do not have any privileges at all. This is evidence that the intertwined laws, which may be secular, religious or traditional in origin has created British laws that bring comfort to the Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities in Britain (Milbank, 2009).

During the 1980's Netherlands and Norway have recognized multiculturalism but have not officially integrated citizenship of immigrants into their policies. However, after the September 2001 attack in the United States, and other violence that rocked their neighbouring regions, integration of Islam has become a very controversial politico-cultural issue and often been inclined on irreconcilability. Norwegian and Dutch politicians have fairly accepted the fact that integration policies have failed in their respective regions and non-Western immigrants have become curious of being able to practice their individual rights (Akkerman and Hagelund, 2007).

Women and children, in particular, have been regarded as properties rather than as human beings by Muslim men. This is what Islam has taught, and Muslims have been accustomed to this perspective that even if they immigrate to other non-Muslim countries, they still carry on with this perspective, even to non-Muslim women. An excellent example of this gender discrimination is the Islamic practice of honour killing where any Muslim can be killed if a Muslim woman has a relationship with a non-Muslim, or when she refuses to wear their veil. Statistics have even shown that more than 95% of honour killings that happened in Europe are on Muslim women <https://assignbuster.com/multiculturalism-in-europe-and-the-world-politics-essay/>

who have been killed at an average age of 21. These women have been killed or tortured by their own family and almost half of the incidents on honour killings happened in England (Chesler, 2010). In Norway and Netherlands' case, women and children are supposed to be protected by the Dutch and Norwegian laws however, with the Islam teaching on family and values, honour killing is justified and is not considered a sin according to the Koran. Aside from honour killings, genital mutilation is also a Muslim practice that has caused debates and was dwelled on by the media. These issues have been publicly debated on in Norway and legislations have been considered to integrate the abused Muslim women into the society. The same approach was done by the Dutch government and policies to provide protection to Muslim women. The undertakings that Norway and the Netherlands went through for several years showed that women's rights is more of an individual right and the violence that victims have experienced in the past need not happen if the leftists were able to see that there should be exemptions to their anti-immigrant demands (Akkerman, 2007).

Europe's challenges in achieving multiculturalism have often been attributed generally to the Muslims. Lalami (2009) assessed the views of Christopher Caldwell when it comes to racism, multiculturalism and Muslims, in particular. Muslims have been considered as a stronger force in a white race-dominated European community, with the same beliefs and traditions even if they come from different lands. Caldwell believes that even as a minority, with only a 5% population in Europe, Muslims still demand for recognition of their culture and traditions. However, Muslim culture appears to be more on the violent and oppressive side. Statistically, most crimes and other minor

offenses are relatively high in areas where there are Muslim populations. Most of Caldwell's racist views were also contested, citing instances to which Caldwell may have simply refused to look for further evidence and consider something good in the minority that threatens him so much. Caldwell's discriminating vision was that of Europe without the Muslims in it (Lalami, 2009). This kind of ideology, apart from being a racist, is an example of a "European only" perspective and contradicts all the founding principles of the policies set by the EU on multiculturalism and minority rights.

Murray and Simcox (2010) discussed on the current situation of Islamism and multiculturalism in Britain. They reported on the actions that Muslims do in Britain when racism occurs, and the impact that it may bring about to the non-Muslim members of the community. The observations that Murray and Simcox (2010) made shows that the British society is still tolerant of the actions of Muslims, as long as they are not hate crimes. Police enforcers have been instructed not to make any arrest on Muslims who voice out their emotions on issues similar to that in Afghanistan or Iraq, provided that they do no harm to other people in the community. This instruction has been given because the British government does not want to create any tension between the Muslims and the British community. The demographics of terrorists and those who help fight the terrorist were shown to be coming from one region, which implies that the region has an underlying civil war, although not completely recognized by the government and it is still not as evident (Murray, 2010). The freedom that the British government provided to the Muslims only encouraged the latter to be aggressive, as it has already been inherent to Islamism.

These observations have been vocally expressed by Britain's Prime Minister Cameron, where he demanded a more strict approach on Muslims who preach about hate and war, and involve themselves in terrorism and extremism. Cameron also emphasized that Britain's, as well as that of the entire European community, have been very cautious so as not to stir any arguments on racial discrimination. Britain's "hands-off" tolerance on Muslims has not helped in creating a society where different cultures will be able to live harmoniously with each other, and even brought about Britain's failure when it comes to fighting terrorism because they have been dubbed by the United States as the haven for terrorist groups. This implies that it is not only the European community that notices this truth, but other countries as well (Burns, 2011). The French president Nicolas Sarkozy has expressed the same views and identified the same group of people to be the cause of their problems - Muslims. He started a campaign calling on the immigrants to be French Muslims rather than continue to live as Muslims in France. This is a call for integration, however, Marine Le Pen has considered Sarkozy's move only as a political tactic (Heneghan, 2011).

Europe's culture is changing, and it is inevitable basically because of the effect of immigration brought about by the society's economic needs. However, religion seems to be the most evident divider among the different members of the community especially when teachings begin to be questioned and rights to perform several customs have been deprived. It is not the fight over jobs or benefits, but simply the exercise of beliefs to which the non-EU people want to be recognized (Lalami, 2009). There seems to be a similarity in terms of the goals that these religious congregations want to

achieve, other than recognition, and it is to invite people into their religion, as well as demand that the laws of the society must be in accordance to their teachings. This diversified demand and attempts of each religious congregation to change Europe are probable reasons why multiculturalism in Europe has not yet succeeded.

Europe, aside from the Middle East, has the most number of Muslim population compared to the United States and Canada. The United States has Asian and Mexican immigrants and a small Muslim population, and multiculturalism has succeeded in this region. Although Europe and the United States have a democratic form of government, the effect on multiculturalism to these regions are completely opposite, primarily because of the religious institutions and teaching to which the immigrants are free to exercise as part of their minority rights. Asians and Mexicans, or other Latin America nationals have almost similar beliefs and their religions do not teach of the justification to invoke violence as opposed to the Muslim teachings in the Koran where a religious war or “ jihad” can be called upon Muslims and wage war against non-Muslim nations. This is the main reason why multiculturalism has been difficult to observe in Europe. The totalitarian perspective of the Muslims has a tendency to bring about extremism because of their entirely different values that are sometimes publicly unjustifiable but because these Muslim immigrants are in a democratic country, their actions and religious practices remain to be a part of their right, and in some cases, the laws that govern their community supersedes that of the state’s legislations. Islamic teachings do not aim to integrate Muslims with other religions, nor does it treat other religious congregations

as equals. It is part of the Islamic teachings to impose ideologies that are parallel to that with their Koran and promote the religion even in nations where they are considered the minority (Lappin, 2007).

Tolerance: Hope for Multiculturalism in Europe

A good example of a religion that appears to mingle and co-exist perfectly with that of either the Muslim or Christian community is Hinduism. Hinduism is based on teachings, and there are no texts that demand to be followed. The religion is more like a way of life rather than being called a religion itself. It is the religion dominant in India, which has allowed the Muslims and Christians to live in harmony because it does not seek to convert people or encourage people to join their community. This is the main difference between India and Europe, where the former has been able to be both democratic and multicultural for more than 50 years, while the latter has been in continuous turmoil with the Muslim minorities in the region. The approach in India on the Muslim community was that of “ tolerance thesis”, wherein the culture of the majority tolerates that of the minority. Hindu tolerance is not based on relativism, and respects the psychology of the “ situated self”, where the behaviour of an individual is influenced by the norms of the community that they belong to, and different communities have their own norms. This tolerance has provided non-Hindu communities their own space to live according to the norms that they have been accustomed with (Mahajan, 2007). Compared to India, minorities in Europe are demanded to turn their backs on their religions and culture to be able to integrate in the society which has led to different militant groups all aiming for equality including the exercise of their customs. But Europeans have always been the

dominant community since historical colonization and even until now where they still regard dark-skinned individuals as their slaves (Banus, 2007). Ironically, they seem to have met a match in the Muslims, who in their own way are a dominant community as well and have retaliated significantly when their customs were prohibited or banned.

Tolerance in its liberal context deals with the individual's capacity to recognise autonomy, where the customary beliefs of a particular religious congregation can only be questioned by the members and all issues concerning them is not of concern to the other religious community. India was able to deal with multiculturalism with tolerance, respect and the "situated self", even without the liberal ideologies. Multiculturalism may be achieved simply by respecting and understanding the roots of a religious community. Although Europe cannot do away with the vigilance of the threats of terrorism, it must be able to accept that there are different cultures and values that may seem absurd, or even grotesque, in as much the same way as minorities like the Muslims and Roman Catholics, find some practices of the European liberal lifestyle to be as misshapen as well.

How has Europe accepted multiculturalism?

From an earlier glorification of the political project that is multiculturalism, the backlash as of late has been quite prominent. Initiatives to promote multiculturalism in Europe have been going on since the 1960s. These have included programs and services geared at public recognition of national minorities or ethnic groups, in education, social services, religious accommodation and others. Vertotec and Wessendorf (2007) enumerated

the broad range of multiculturalism efforts around Europe, which may vary in application from country to country, including:

1. Public recognition: The idea is to provide support for ethnic majority organizations, activities that spread awareness about diversity, and facilities. There were also public consultative bodies which incorporate ethnically diverse organizations.

2. Education: In the schools, there was ample consideration and respect for dress codes and recognition of gender-specific practices. Moreover, curricula were created to reflect the diversity of the school population and to orient ethnic students with the culture of their peers in order to raise their self confidence. Teaching was available in the mother tongue and support for ethnic languages was offered. The establishment of religious-private or publicly-funded schools was also allowed.

3. Social services: Multiculturalism was also adopted in social service by allowing the dissemination of information and training of public employees, healthcare providers, social workers, the police, and courts in culturally-sensitive practices in the performance of their duties.

4. Public materials: Campaigns to promote health and provide information to state-sponsored services are made available in diverse languages.

5. Law: The law provided for cultural exceptions such as the exemption of Sikhs to wear helmets when riding motor vehicles, taking of oath through the Qur'an or the Bhagavad Gita, the recognition of marriage performed in other

religious persuasions, as well as recognition of culture-specific provisions on divorce and inheritance.