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## The death of cosmopolitanism and the rise of multiculturalism: how immigrants and refugees can safely be demonized

When two writers, André Aciman (Egyptian-born) and Panagiotis Markaris (Greek), conducted an open dialogue at the beginning of 2011 (Onassis Cultural Centre-Athens, Greece: http://www.sgt.gr/en/programme/event/151), they were trying to see if cosmopolitan cultures can actually exist – or if it is simply a utopian fantasy. Talking ruefully from their personal experience – Aciman was born and brought up in Alexandria and Markaris in Constantinople – they acknowledged the possibility of a full integration of, and the co-existence of, different cultures in the same time and space. This would be cosmopolitanism. From their point of view, and in line with the troubled history of cosmopolitanism in the Mediterranean basin, such a harmonious and co-cultural experience hardly ever happened. Nevertheless, it was, for long periods, a governing political ideal which rendered questions of tolerance and respect redundant. Why would there be a need for tolerance and respect if there was an authentic collectivity – communitas – in existence? Hence the ideal of cosmopolitanism serves as an important problematization of contemporary discourses on multicultural organization.

Today's Europe (and maybe the United States as well) would align with the skepticism of Aciman and Markaris. Isn't such skepticism (or even cynicism) precisely what depoliticization and demonizing of immigrants and refugees has given us? Trump's election and Brexit highlight the tendency to close borders and start to consider what to do with the 'many' immigrants the British had to 'put up with' since the Second World War.

So, in today's populist political language, cosmopolitanism sounds a magical, exotic and even tropical idea. Simply not realistic. How has this come about? How has the idea of cosmopolitanism collapsed like a pack of cards? As Aciman (2007) puts it, while in cosmopolitan societies people used to live harmoniously, integration was missing. This is why (he says) the ideal that many immigrants hoped for – integration – has turned into an anti-climax.

Žižek (2010) goes further and castigates the basic rules of tolerance and co-existence as a kind of alienation, and he suggests we love 'our neighbour' for his imperfections, instead of simply tolerating the inequality of our relationships. This notion highlights the unsatisfactory phenomenon in which wealthy people just give some of their money to the poor instead of trying to reach out directly in an embodied and human manner to 'the foreclosed suffering Other' (ibid., p. 98).

After the Second World War, and under the remaining dull cloud of fascism and racism all over Europe, multicultural ideas and policies in the media and in legislation started to emerge. It is the inter-related process between these two fields – media and law – that generates the ideas which

govern the social (Horsti & Hultén, 2011). So there is the first official sign of an undermining of cosmopolitanism in favor of multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism, as an idea, tried to meet the social, political and economic needs of contemporary Western societies, which saw their cultural status changing rapidly due to global demographic and economic changes. Following the economic fragmentation of the 1960s and 1970s, cultures also showed signs of fragmentation (Friedman, 1994). Friedman (1994) suggested that, instead of focusing on globalization as an idea, and one that would have preserved the main features of cosmopolitanism, we should turn our attention to 'the way in which moving objects and people are identified, assimilated, marginalised or rejected' (p. 1). So, the ideal of a kind of global competency is overtaken by a compulsion to produce a 'cultural mosaic' (Kahn, 1995, p. 129) where the individual has to change and actually become *multicultural* in order to fit in the already existing social and cultural structure.

The problems with multiculturalism have been much discussed. For example, Slavoj Žižek (2006), while critiquing global capitalism, refers to multiculturalism as capitalism's 'ideal form of ideology' (p. 170), reprising the problematic colonial relationships of power rather than undermining them. In a sense, multiculturalism repatriates colonialism, in my take on Žižek's conceptualization. Multiculturalism is like an elegant and cordial expression of racial superiority in which one officially respects 'the other' but retains their/our own superiority. A similar point is made by Kundnani's (2011) observation concerning confusion in the culture of colonized people following the departure of (usually) the Europeans. In our era, the same confusion takes place – but this time it's a form of import from the former colonial territory into the former colonial culture.

Thinking it through, there is little doubt that the 'multicultural person' is an immigrant from a formerly colonial territory. Hence, multiculturalism is the direct socio-political descendant of colonialism. Immigrants and refugees are socially forced to adopt elements from all the cultures of the society where they live, otherwise it seems difficult even to survive if they sustain purely their traditional culture. On the other hand, the people who adopt elements from other cultures (e.g. an Italian cooking sushi or an English person learning tango) could be perceived as people keen to embrace multiculturalism, but there is a question whether they can be called multicultural as such, simply because they do not have to distort their cultural identity, it is their choice and their choices are probably motivated by a desire for personal development.

At this point in our history, despite the promises of multiculturalism, the dominant situation remains that some cultures are undeniably superior to others. That is why, in a multicultural society, such inferior cultures have and deserve fewer rights. Since the so-called 'terrorist' attacks of the twenty-first century, there has been a dispute on the success of multiculturalism. What is very rarely said is that the collapse of even the ideal of cosmopolitanism is, to a large extent, responsible for creating a void into which colonialism and racism have merely been cleaned up and rendered presentable.

By promoting the 'multi' part of multiculturalism, the cosmopolitan substratum of all cultures has been lost. Paradoxically, the arrival of Brexit and the US election result highlight that the right to be an individual rests much more on cosmopolitanism than on multiculturalism.

Photo from a tube station wall in NYC (November 2016)

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