Book Review: The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe: A History

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In the very first page of the Introduction: 'The Multicultural and Multiculturalism', Rita Chin (Associate Professor of History at the University of Michigan) relates the supposed 'failure' of multiculturalism in Europe to the rapid rise of populist political parties strongly opposed to what they consider to be excess immigration. But it soon becomes clear that this book is intended as a history, more than as a contemporary analysis. From the outset the author stresses the difficulty of defining multiculturalism, commenting on historical and definitional ambiguities. It also becomes clear that this book is not actually about Europe in its entirety; rather it represents a limited comparative approach, focusing primarily on Britain, France, and Germany, as well as the Netherlands and occasionally Switzerland. In this introduction ample attention is paid to the initial conceptualization of 'multiculturalism' in the United States, first in 1944, then the term was popularized during the 1960s to describe pluralism and politicization. It seems strange that only brief passing mention is made of Canada, the only country where multiculturalism was made an official national policy (in 1971); there is no reference to or use of the extensive Canadian literature on multiculturalism—the only Canadian source mentioned in a list of 'Suggestions for Further Reading' in the rear of the book is W. Kymlicka's *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*

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(1966). The author does briefly comment on the rather bewildering range of descriptions of the varieties of multiculturalism, such as 'conservative', 'liberal', 'pluralist', 'critical', 'commercial' or 'corporate', 'strong' and 'weak' multiculturalism, yet does not directly explain the fundamental distinction between multiculturalism as a sociological reality, an ideology, or a policy (although this distinction is later implied). She does respond to a number of critiques of multiculturalism: 'One of the central complaints lodged against multiculturalism is that it fosters superficial paeans to cultural diversity as opposed to inclusive visions for how to manage it...' Multiculturalism, by contrast, 'denotes the strategies and policies adopted to manage and govern the problems of diversity and multiplicity' which characterize multicultural societies. In other words, 'multiculturalism designates a programmatic statement or specific approach for dealing with multicultural societies. As such, it can be articulated in the guise of political philosophy, social ideal, or state policy.' Yet it is not one thing: 'In practice there are innumerable models for managing cultural diversity, and many of them claim the label "multiculturalism"... Given the sheer variety of multiculturalisms, it is not especially surprising that the concept has provoked an equally various set of criticisms.' She queries: 'If multiculturalism contains so many meanings—some of them quite contradictory—does it continue to serve any constructive purpose?' Yet she concludes: 'Simply writing off multiculturalism as a "failed" experiment— or a project that has outlived its usefulness – does little to change conditions on the ground...The basic fact of ethnic and cultural diversity in European cities, neighbourhoods, and streets remains' (18-22).

Chapter 1, 'The Birth of Multicultural Europe', describes 'how this diversity developed in Europe in the first place' (23). The author suggests that while it is popular among academics to consider the increase in the ethnic diversity of Europe to have been due to immigration following the Second World War, actually this diversity goes much farther back in history; yet her interest is virtually exclusively post-war. In the section titled 'Empire and Labor', she focusses initially on Britain, starting with the first West Indian immigration in 1948, observing that Britain had been a country of emigration but would now become a country of immigration as it began to inherit imperial immigration (and was not sure what to do about it when imperial migrants could claim to be British subjects–the question soon arose as to how much would be too much). The author then turns her attention to France, which had a long history of diversity (exemplified in the Jews among others), but following the war Algerian immigration soon outpaced Italian and Iberian. In the next section, on

'Decolonization, Economic Expansion', similarly imperial immigration into the Netherlands from Indonesia and particularly the Moluccas is described. This is followed by a section on 'Labor and Guest Workers'—the arrival of significant numbers of *gastarbeiter* in West Germany and Switzerland—a topic with which the author is especially familiar, having authored *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (2007). Then, in the section on 'Complications Amid the Economic Boom', she describes the development of *bidonvilles* in France and the increasing reaction to continuing North African migration following the Algerian war; in Britain the backlash to what had become large numbers of West Indians, race riots in Nottingham and Notting Hill, resulting in the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1962; and similar developments in West Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. In the section titled 'The Long Shadow of Empire', the mass immigration of South Asians is described. And finally, the section on 'The End of Prosperity' (by 1973) describes Swiss cutbacks, Dutch tightening of admission standards for guest workers, the end to the guest worker policy in West Germany, and growing hostility of French workers toward immigrants in France.

The second chapter, 'Managing Multicultural Societies', continues with a description of efforts to curb immigrants and guest workers. This leads into a lengthy discussion of race relations in Britain from the 1950s through seventies, then compares this trend with what was happening in the Netherlands—a policy of 'pillarization' with the arrival of large numbers of Surinamese; in France—a policy of 'insertion' with the rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen and the Front National during the late 1970s and early 1980s; and the policy of *auslanderpolitik* in West Germany.

In Chapter 3, 'Race, Nation, and Multicultural Society', the reader is taken from 'isolated moments' during the seventies to 'major controversies' during the eighties. Much attention is paid to the influence of the Rushdie affair after 1989. According to the author, 'cultural nationalism' came to replace racism in Britain. Ever since Enoch Powell's infamous 'rivers of blood' speech in 1968, British society had evidenced 'racist inclinations', leading eventually to the British Nationality Act of 1981. That same year anti-police violence had occurred at Brixton. Thatcher 'repackaged Powell's transgressive ideas of racial difference into a more positive argument about cultural and national belonging'. At the time, British nationalism was bolstered by the Falklands war during 1982. In the section titled 'Making the Nation Respectable', the author describes West German attitudes and politics: 'The goal was to offer positive narratives of German belonging that would inspire pride – rather than guilt

or shame – in the nation's history… However, efforts to resuscitate national identity, culture, or history were anything but simple given Germany's National Socialist past' (155-6). In 1987, Franz Josef Strauss, head of the Christian Socialist Union, strongly advocated that 'it's high time we emerged from the shadow of the Third Reich…and become a normal nation again'. Chin—who co-authored *After the Nazi Racial State: Difference and Democracy in Germany and Europe* (2009)—has added:

> Given West Germany's status as heir to the Third Reich, it was crucial that this exercise in defining national belonging steer clear of explicit pronouncements of racial difference…Given the country's heavy historical burden, we might have expected the Federal Republic – among Western European states – to be the most open to the possibility of a truly heterogeneous, multicultural population (157, 160, 163).

Yet this was countered by a growing popular opinion that Turks were unassimilable—which in turn would lead to concern more broadly over 'Islamicization'. By now, though, a new generation of Germans was more interested in the politics of the New Left. The chapter concludes with a section on the 'Resurgence of Republicanism', describing the increasing French preoccupation with national identity, represented particularly in the rise of the Front National and the 1987 Commission de la Nationalité under Chirac.

The fourth chapter, on 'Muslim Women, Sexual Democracy, and the Defense of Freedom', begins with the 1989 Muslim headscarves controversy in French schools, and how headscarves became a national problem, leading to the Sarkozy policy aimed at banning the *foulard* after 2003 and prohibiting headscarves in identity photos (a policy which soon reoccurred in other European countries and beyond Europe, notably in Quebec). The sections on 'Women and the Civilizing Mission', 'From Migrant Women to Muslim Women', 'Secular Muslim Women', and 'Sexual Democracy' focus on the status of Muslim women in Europe, the role played by 'secular Muslim' women (surely a contradiction, if Muslim implies religious affiliation) such as Fadela Amara in France and Hirsi Ali in the Netherlands, the French emphasis on *laicit*é (secularity) in national identity, and the inevitable conflict of values. Incidentally, the author uncritically uses the term 'women of colour' (as opposed to what exactly–colourless women?), reminiscent of the equally inappropriate popular Canadian term 'visible minority' (as opposed to a presumed invisible majority?).

After all this pertinent historical review, now we get right to the point in the fifth chapter on 'The "Failure" of Multiculturalism'. Here the author attempts to provide a counter-argument to Merkel's October 2010 speech in Germany that 'the multicultural

concept is a failure, an absolute failure', soon followed by Cameron's emphasis of 'muscular liberalism' in Britain and Sarkozy's emphasis of national identity in France, together with a 'war on terrorism' (about which this book has little to say). However, no sooner do we finally reach more contemporary time than the author backtracks into historical background from the sixties to the eighties, first in Britain, then West and united Germany and France. She points out, in the next section on 'Minority Critics of Multiculturalism', that even within ethnic minorities there have been critics of state-sponsored multiculturalism policy. The next section goes on to suggest 'How Multiculturalism's Failure Became Common Sense', then in a section on the 'Death Knell of Multiculturalism' she summarizes what actually are 'three different versions of an obituary for European multiculturalism' (represented in British, German, and French politics), 'yet, arguably, these were three different versions of the same basic position... They demanded integration and offered strict stipulations about what that looked like' (285-6).

So, in the concluding Chapter 6, what may be 'The Future of Multicultural Europe'? Essentially, these nationalistic pronouncements, while understandable in historical context, may seem rather simplistic. The author questions a 'highly specific conception of liberalism' based on 'core common values – namely, individual freedom and sexual democracy', together with a 'further paradox in a collective push to defend liberal values as Europe's common core' (288-9). She again refers to a growing emphasis less on race than culture (295). Her conclusions:

> It should be clear by now that simply declaring multiculturalism a failure is supremely unhelpful.... The motors driving this heterogeneity, of course, are not simply a thing of the past. Although European governments closed their borders to unskilled labour migrants decades ago, non-Europeans continue to arrive' (297-8).

To say the least....

> The broader dismissal of multiculturalism has been profoundly undemocratic.... Declaring multiculturalism "dead" is a way of white Britons, Germans, and French telling immigrants, "We don't recognize you; you aren't a part of our society". Such blanket dismissals deny immigrants a legitimate place in European society and effectively refuse them any status as social or political actors. It writes them out of the debate by ignoring their presence.... For immigrants who have lived in Europe for many generations now, they constitute something closer to ideological violence and raise the specter of social apartheid.... In practical terms, the shared presumption that multiculturalism is a failure has also largely terminated meaningful debate about how to manage diversity through concrete forms of policy making (299-300).

Chin goes on to specify necessary conditions in order 'to envision a more effective politics around European diversity': First, 'recognizing that... the political, cultural, and discursive space opened up by "the multicultural question" must resonate within the public sphere for European democracy to function properly'. Second, within 'an insistently historical perspective... there is no doubt that the values of liberty and equality must be the starting point for any effort to foster democratic debate in relation to ethnic diversity'. Third, we cannot 'cling to a blind, unreconstructed celebration of pluralism and cultural relativism'. And lastly, 'a final condition for more effective social and political engagement with European diversity is democracy itself.... It is important to recognize that simply acknowledging multicultural diversity does not ensure any particular political outcome' (300-304).

In sum, this is an excellent historical review of multicultural diversity and policies primarily in just four countries (Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands—and to a far more limited extent Switzerland)—but no further comparative discussion in other European countries, nor any mention of important multiculturalism policy in Canada (which could influence and perhaps already has influenced comparable policies in Europe). It is extremely well researched, describing events, attitudes and policies in detail, mainly from the sixties through the nineties in these particular four countries. It does bring us up to the present, however the reader finds little comment on the massive influx in recent years of Syrian and other Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African migrants into Europe, much less how all this has affected multiculturalism and immigrant/refugee integration policies, nor popular attitudes and the rapid rise of populist politicians strongly opposed to mass immigration and refugees. Indeed, the rapid increase in ethnic diversity in these European countries will concomitantly increasingly test the accommodative capacities of countries which may seem loath to depart too hurriedly from their traditional nation-state identification. Nonetheless, this is a thought-provoking book, a vital analysis of historical trends during recent decades, leading to a contemporary mindset and influencing current policies.

References

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