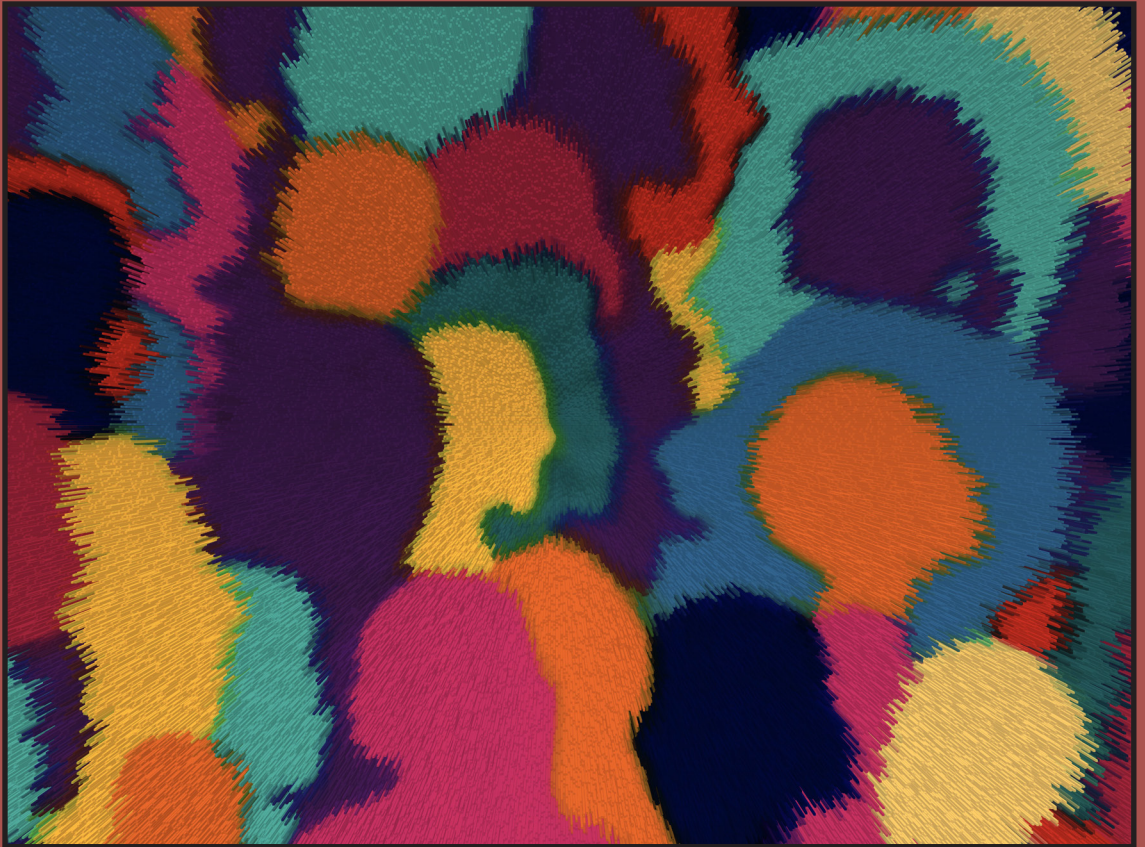


Challenges to Multiculturalism. Exploring Indian and Italian Experiences

Edited by Enzo Colombo and
Venkatanarayanan Sethuraman



Milano University Press

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Preface

This book is the result of the scientific collaboration between the Department of International Studies, Political Science and History, CHRIST University, Bangalore India and the Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Milan, Italy. The academic collaboration between the two universities has been very active in conducting a joint credit course “Globalization, Social Justice and Human Rights”. Along with the global classroom for the above course, we conducted the international seminar “Multicultural Issues: A Comparison of India and Europe” on April 20 and 21st, 2023, where scholars from India and Italy actively presented their research and deliberated on the issue.

The multicultural challenges, being a global phenomenon, need more cross-country understanding as lessons learned from different societies will help us in understanding the issue in a more holistic manner. Due to large-scale migration from Asia and Africa towards European countries and also political chauvinism emerging due to the crisis as the result of the Neo-liberal political and economic order, we need more deliberations and understanding of the newly emerging societies. The course and the international seminar have given us the opportunity to discuss in detail these topics dealing with constitutional issues, education, language etc. The outcome of this collaboration in the form of this book will be a valuable addition to understanding multicultural issues from different societies with unique historical backgrounds.

We thank Fr. Dr. Jose CC, Vice-Chancellor, CHRIST University, India and Prof. Roberto Pedersini, Head of the Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Milan, Italy for initiating the collaboration between the two universities and documenting the outcome in the form of this book. We look forward to continuing this collaboration and engaging in more meaningful discussions on issues that can make our society better for all.

Enzo Colombo, Venkatanarayanan Sethuraman
Milan, Bangalore, January 2025

Chapter 1

Multicultural Issues: A Comparison of India and Europe

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Abstract

The chapter introduces the general framework of the multicultural debate in India and Europe, highlighting the points of originality and convergence. India and Europe, despite having different historical paths, today find themselves facing similar problems regarding the possibility of developing inclusive societies, capable of integrating diversity and difference in a context of democratic participation in common social and political life. India had to face – well before the multicultural debate was consolidated in the West – the question of including cultural difference in the definition of national unity. The central point of the multicultural comparison was the effort and need to build unity, solidarity and a sense of common belonging starting from the recognition of cultural differences. In many respects Europe has had to deal with an inverse problem: how to recognize the plurality and multiplicity of cultural differences starting from a deep-rooted idea of internal homogeneity which constituted the ideological and rhetorical basis of the formation of European nation states. A narrative of homogeneity and cultural purity which has fostered both internal cohesion and competitive distinction with other European states, but which is unmasked in its claim to naturalness by migratory phenomena and globalization processes. After briefly introducing the different ways in which multiculturalism has been

interpreted in the different European and Indian contexts, the chapter analyses the main criticisms advanced to the idea of multiculturalism. It highlights how, despite the theoretical and practical difficulties of multiculturalism, European and Indian societies cannot but consider cultural difference as one of their constitutive and structural elements.

Introduction

The issue of cultural diversity is central to contemporary political and social debates. Globalization processes have intensified the perception and awareness of the importance that different forms of life have in defining the experience and social orientation of individuals. The question of recognition and respect for cultural diversity has become a central and debated theme of national policies, encouraging, on the one hand, new demands for inclusion and, on the other, new forms of identity closure.

Multiculturalism as an approach to state and politics locates the individual as firmly embedded within a cultural group or community. In political theory, multiculturalism finds itself at a crossroads between liberal and communitarian positions. Does multiculturalism, in acknowledging community membership of the individual increase the scope of rights and entitlements of the individual or does it, in giving primacy to the community over the individual, thwart individual autonomy, choice and agency? On the other hand, how effective is multiculturalism's emphasis on the community in affirming and reinforcing citizenship rights in the modern state? These have been some common predilections in political theory when addressing the welcome themes of cultural diversity, plurality and their recognition in states claiming to be multicultural.

Cultural diversity is articulated best by the theoretical framework of multiculturalism. While most societies are characterised by pluralism i.e. the existence of groups based on distinct religions, cultures, languages etc, multiculturalism goes a step further than just a mere existence and acknowledgment and seeks to embrace and include this diversity in state policy. To this end, multiculturalism has been a desirable policy choice for many states, especially in the 20th century. This interest in multiculturalism emerged amidst international events such as the post-Second World War migrations in Europe and the conflict between the English and French populations in Canada. Canada in fact was one of the first Western countries to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy in the 1970s. The United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Germany, and other countries in Europe also attempted to accommodate diversity and minority communities within this policy. In the United States, multiculturalism developed as a critique of the classic assimilationist "melting pot" model, which has been criticized for placing too much emphasis on the unifying force of civic duty at the detriment of specific attention to cultural embeddedness.

In South Asia, questions of cultural diversity were addressed by an inclusive Constitution and were enshrined in policies of secularism and religious neutrality. In some countries like Sri Lanka, multiculturalism was acknowledged, albeit grudgingly as is evident in the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. In countries like India, the Constitution accommodated certain distinct identities of citizens more within the context of the secular neutral state in the form of multiculturalism. In either of the above cases, the point to be reiterated is the sovereign state's decision to officially address questions of diversity and distinctiveness and institute mechanisms to realise and negotiate them. This brings us to another important point i.e. that multiculturalism, unlike liberalism, communitarianism and a host of other traditional ideas/schools of thought is relatively new, nascent and hence has been a site for contestation as much as it has served as a platform for recognizing culture as a legitimate identity in political and legal dimensions.

The contradictions and ambivalences of the debate on multiculturalism

Although multiculturalism has established itself as a viable political and cultural horizon for the inclusion of cultural difference within democratic societies, it has not been free from harsh criticism. Although a series of empirical research (Vertovec & Wassendorf, 2010; Banting & Kymlicka, 2013; Korteweg & Triadafilopoulos, 2015; Back & Sinha 2016; Johansson 2024) highlights how the implementation of multicultural policies continues to be a fundamental tool – and widely used by Western governments – for the promotion of fair and effective integration policies, critical and contrary voices have spread and amplified to the point of constituting a new common sense which sees the 'defence' and 'recognition' of difference as a point of weakness and a threat to national identity. In part, the critical controversy surrounding multiculturalism is due to the success of the term. As often happens with words that become a common part of the political and everyday lexicon, the term 'multiculturalism' has ended up taking on different meanings which have often hindered an open and rational debate. It is possible to identify at least four levels of meaning of the term multiculturalism in current debates (Colombo, 2011; Berry & Ward, 2016; Safdar, Chahar Mahali & Scott, 2023).

A first level concerns the use of the term to 'describe' a presumed characteristic condition of contemporary societies. This reading, characteristic of sociology, highlights how contemporary societies are characterized by the presence of multiple groups that have different values and normative references. Multiculturalism tends, in this case, to highlight the effects of globalization processes which lead to a more frequent experience of difference and tend to

weaken, or transform, the forms of social cohesion and solidarity recognition in a single community. It is intended to describe a condition that has become constitutive, and structural, of contemporary societies: a widespread and permanent presence of diversified cultural references (languages, beliefs, values, traditions, identifications, lifestyles, and expectations for the future), that co-exist within the same social space. Multiculturalism is used here to “take note” of the current condition, inserted in a global horizon, characterized by change, flow, and mixing. In the “sociological” perspective, attention is mainly focused on the difference/solidarity polarity and the questions raised refer to the possibility of guaranteeing a sufficient degree of solidarity and social cohesion, of tolerance and communication between differences, without giving up their respective specificities and without ceasing to fight forms of discrimination and misrecognition. It questions the relative positions of power of different cultural groups and how these affect the distribution of obligations and privileges within society.

A debate closer to the perspective of political philosophy tends to use the term “multiculturalism” to foreground normative and justice theory problems that arise when we try to review the assumptions of liberal democracy – founded on universalism and equality of individuals in public space – taking into account cultural differences. It highlights the need to reformulate the liberal ideal of Good and Right by considering not only individual freedom and personal fulfilment but also the recognition of difference and the importance of cultural beliefs and cultural belonging. This means overcoming, or integrating, the liberal principles of guaranteeing individual freedoms to enhance the community dimension and make room for the recognition of collective rights. The extreme positions in this debate tend to contrast a strenuous defence of liberal democracy, with its absolute aversion to any manifestation and recognition of cultural difference in public space, with an explicit and extensive recognition of community rights. In the first case, the theories of justice developed within the framework of liberal democracy are seen as the only model of coexistence capable of offering participation and inclusion to all individuals, regardless of ethnic origin, religious faith, culture, gender and social condition. Difference, according to this perspective, must be protected and guaranteed in the private sphere but cannot and must not be used to claim special treatment in the public space. In the second case – a communitarian perspective – the need to overcome the liberal model, its apparent neutrality and its misleading universalism because it is incapable of guaranteeing equal dignity and respect, especially to minority groups, is underlined. From this perspective, only a full recognition of cultural rights – truly collective rights – can guarantee minority identities against the assimilationist claims of the majority group. The concrete multicultural debate develops between these two poles, seeking coherent forms of respect for individual freedom and recognition of the relevance of collective belonging.

The problematic dimension that catalyses the discussion in the field of political philosophy is represented by the difference/universalism polarity, while the relevant questions are related to the possibility of reconciling respect for cultural differences without renouncing democratic principles.

A vision closer to the interests of political science tends to use “multiculturalism” to define the concrete conditions within which to implement a series of social policies for the inclusion of minorities. The central theme, in this case, is the need/possibility of defining social policies that favour civil coexistence and the participation of different cultural groups in collective life. From the perspective of political science, the issue at stake in multiculturalism is to create inclusion policies that allow the development of social cohesion and cooperation while respecting mutual differences. The central issues refer to the dimension defined by the polarity recognition of difference/respect for the principles of equal opportunities. The central themes of discussion concern the possibility of promoting the inclusion of minority groups, the management of conflicts through the recognition of cultural differences, the reconciliation of cultural diversity with political unity, and the development of a shared sense of national belonging.

Finally, “multiculturalism” can take on an ideological character and be used to indicate a concrete model of future society and prescribe the actions necessary for its realization (or to counteract its realization). The emphasis on respect for difference fuels both reactionary and populist projects that claim the need to build adequate barriers so that differences can be preserved and reproduced autonomously, freeing them from the threat of contamination with other differences, and progressive projects that see multiculturalism as a criticism of the hegemonic and despotic tendencies of the majority group. While supporters of multiculturalism emphasize the need to transform power relations that allow the dominant group to derive privileges from the imposition of its own culture as canon, opponents accuse it of promoting social fragmentation and parallel lives, undermining the functioning of the state and welfare policies (Cantle 2001). The polarity highlighted in this case refers to the pairs stability/change and continuity/discontinuity. The problems raised are mainly located on an ideological level, considering cultural difference as a disintegrating or innovative force of social bonds and as a central factor in the dynamics of social change.

Beyond the differences in meaning attributed to multiculturalism, it is however possible to identify a central nucleus of issues that have characterized this political proposal since the 1970s. By denouncing the impracticability and undesirability of assimilation proclaimed by the philosophy of the melting pot, multiculturalism advances a different model of coexistence in the same common space: a coexistence that recognizes and assigns adequate attention to and respect for cultural differences. Multicultural perspectives emphasize that

pluralism, rather than homologation, and debate, rather than consensus, constitute the defining characteristic of democratic coexistence.

Multiculturalism thus introduces a different way of looking at cultural differences and conceiving models of coexistence within the same public space without ignoring the diversity of histories, values, ethical and moral orientations, vocabularies and symbolic resources available to individuals and groups. So, despite their complexity and variability, it is possible to identify some lines of claim that animate the multicultural debates:

a. to promote greater and effective democratic inclusion, ensuring equal access and participation for all members of society, without making inclusion conditional on prior assimilation into the dominant group; that is, to promote the full realization of democratic ideals, which are often enunciated but not fully realized;

b. to overcome previous relations of domination and exclusion of minority groups, acknowledging the violence and exploitation carried out by members of the dominant group, who imposed their rules and ideas by presenting them as 'natural' and 'universal';

c. to involve all members of society in the debate on the democratic 'rules of the game' and let everyone have a voice in discussions about common decisions on how to define public space and how to build a fairer and more just society; here there is a request for a revision of the current democratic rules so that social justice is increased by criticizing the privileges and hegemonic position of the dominant group (of the male-white-heterosexual-Christian-...);

d. to ensure adequate recognition and respect for cultural differences, actively combating stereotypes and prejudices that negatively depict minority groups by trapping their members in belittling and dismissive representations;

e. to recognise the right to be different, to maintain one's religious beliefs, sexual identifications and preferences, lifestyles and moral orientation without being discriminated against or excluded;

f. to give prominence to the 'collective', 'cultural' dimension, to cultural belongings and rights, and not only to individual rights.

Multicultural demands are therefore not reduced to a 'defence' of difference but demand: 1) greater inclusion and greater equity, 2) a revision of the rules of democratic coexistence that allows positions of domination and privilege to be subjected to criticism and 3) greater respect for difference, its recognition and the freedom to be able to manifest it in the public space. A truly inclusive society, the multicultural claim argues, can only be a society in which people can be free to enter the public space without giving up their specificities and histories.

European multiculturalisms

While in other Western nations, such as the USA, Canada and Australia, multiculturalism has mainly concerned the issue of the inclusion of marginalized internal minorities and the recognition of the rights of indigenous populations, in Europe the debate has focused on migration. Since the Second World War, Europe has transformed from a land of emigration to a land of immigration. The post-war reconstruction and subsequent industrial development created a strong demand for manpower, which was satisfied above all by making use of a massive migratory flow. The migrants largely came from former colonies or poorer regions of southern Europe: Algeria and other sub-Saharan African countries for France; India, Pakistan and Caribbean countries for Great Britain; Suriname and Antilles for the Netherlands; Southern Italy and Turkey for Germany. Until the 1970s, immigration in Europe was essentially conceived as temporary: a phenomenon destined to cease and reverse its course when the demand for labour had been remedied. It was with the oil crisis of the early 1970s that industrial growth slowed down and immigration emerged as a problem. The old, consolidated models of immigrant integration – essentially based on the idea of assimilation (France), temporary guest workers (Germany) and subordinate inclusion (Great Britain) – showed their limits and the question of recognizing cultural differences as a central element of coexistence in multicultural societies has arisen.

How to organize social relations in societies characterized by the coexistence of different groups with different cultural references has become a critical aspect of European democracies, often dividing the field between those who saw multicultural policies as a development and expansion of democratic values and practices and those who instead considered them responsible for weakening social cohesion, and for encouraging the development of communities living parallel lives. Within this common scenario, the multicultural debate has developed in a partially different way in relation to the different national contexts.

In the 1970s, Britain essentially recognized itself as a multicultural society. Multiculturalism has mainly been associated with racial and religious discrimination. A series of regulatory interventions have sought to counteract any practice that disadvantaged a particular racial group, directly or indirectly. The government has sought to promote racial and ethnic equity, often through multicultural education for primary and secondary school students. Since the early years of the current century, multicultural policies have been accused of promoting fragmentation rather than social cohesion. Starting from the Cattle Report in 2001, the need to strengthen social cohesion rather than promote the recognition and valorisation of cultural difference has been insisted on. Multiculturalism has been accused of promoting ‘parallel lives’, that is, of creating conditions whereby groups with different cultural orientations and traditions live side by side

without mutual dialogue. After a series of urban clashes which often featured young white British people and young British children of immigrants, as well as the Islamist attacks on the London Underground in July 2005, “community cohesion” has become a favoured concept over multiculturalism (Meer *et al.*, 2015). Although at the level of political discourse multiculturalism is defined as a failure, the situation of the actual policies implemented is more articulated and complex. As Grillo (2010: 63) observes:

«Multiculturalism is under pressure across the political spectrum, in a climate dominated by the event of 2001 and much tension around the Islamic presence. But faith communities are promoted, and in sites where hybridity is produced (school, playgrounds, mixed marriages, the arts, music) there is a multiplicity of voices, languages, dialects, registers, joking, playing, crossing, engaging in dialogues through which new identities and relationships emerge».

‘Pillarization’ over a long period guided the Dutch public orientation towards cultural difference. It was a system in which different cultural communities (both religious – mostly Catholic and Protestant – and secular) were given their own space through the creation of confessional schools, associations, newspapers, trade unions and political parties. Pillarization focused on forms of integration aimed at preserving cultural identity and specificity. Within this system, no group, secular or religious, was considered more important than another. Since the 1990s, Dutch policies have tended to be defined as multicultural and, rather than inspired by the valorisation and defence of cultural difference, are more oriented towards the socio-economic integration of migrants and their inclusion in the labour market (Prins & Saharso, 2010). The model came under substantial criticism and revision after the assassination of Pim Fortuyn in 2002, a far-right politician who advocated the need to limit immigration and promote Dutch values and identity, which were, in his view, threatened by an invasive and prevaricating Islamist culture. Multicultural policies are more frequently and explicitly accused of not being effective and minority groups are blamed for not wanting to integrate into Dutch society despite the opportunities offered to them. The idea spreads that the lack of integration of migrants was due to their lack of knowledge of the Dutch language, values and traditions. To this end, policies are promoted that impose a series of constraints on obtaining Dutch citizenship, such as knowledge of the Dutch language, culture, and history (Bonjour & Duyvendak, 2019). Muslims, in particular, are accused of not wanting to integrate and of wanting to preserve cultural orientations – such as the failure to recognize a necessary distinction between religion and state, between religion and law – incompatible with a democratic society.

Given the emphasis on *laïcité* and indivisibility of the Republic and the hostility to the manifestation of cultural diversity in public space, France has often been considered “the multicultural anti-model” (Aubry de Maromont, 2021).

Individuals are thought of, in their relationship with the state, as ‘citizens’ – that is, members of the French people – and not as members of sub-state cultural communities. The Republic is one, and all French citizens enjoy equality in the public space as ‘French’. Making requests for recognition and differential treatment on the basis of one’s cultural difference is not intended to be acceptable and compatible with the ideals of the Republic. The French state does not acknowledge “identity” or “cultural belonging” as a political force or a legitimate basis for mobilization and claims-making (Chabal 2024). Minority cultures must abandon their specificities when acting in public space. Fidelity to the principle of *laïcité* leads to making a clear distinction between public space and private space. No manifestation of cultural difference is accepted in public space; it can find free expression only in private space. Given these premises, the French debate on the management of cultural differences has focused on the manifestation – or, more precisely, on the need to deny such manifestation – of differences in public space, with particular regard to religious dress codes. A long and broad debate has concerned in particular the use of the traditional Muslim headscarf, the hijab, and, in a more general form, the use of conspicuous religious and political symbols in public schools. In 2003, the Stasi Commission, established by President Chirac and composed of authoritative French intellectuals, proposed banning religious symbols in schools. The suggestion became law of the Republic in 2004 (Simon & Sala Pala, 2010). The ‘headscarf ban’ was followed by other bans, all aimed at prohibiting the manifestation of cultural differences – and in particular the manifestation of religious identity – in public space. In 2010, a law was passed prohibiting clothing that conceals the face in public space; in 2016 mayors in dozens of French coastal towns banned swimwear that ‘ostentatiously’ showed one’s religion (the so-called burkini) (Nielson, 2020). Although, on paper, France has remained strictly faithful to the principle of *laïcité*, in practice – and not unlike other European nations – it has in fact implemented soft multicultural policies (Samers, 2020; Chabal, 2024). Despite the official declaration that difference is not relevant and has no consideration in the public sphere, in the practice of urban administration municipalities have had to deal with the need to manage cultural pluralism, contain forms of discrimination and promote participation and integration of minorities.

In Germany “multiculturalism” has taken on the same more negative connotation that it had in France. Multiculturalism was not officially conceived as a desirable outcome, an effective way of managing social pluralism, but as a threat to national cohesion (Fisher & Mohrman 2021). Germany has never defined itself as a nation of immigration, but rather as a nation that needs immigrants (Plamper, 2023). For years, strict adherence to the principle of *ius sanguinis* considered Germans only those who descended from German parents. Only in 2000 was the principle of *ius sanguinis* softened and accompanied by a mild *ius soli*, according to which children born in Germany to non-German

citizens could benefit from German citizenship provided, at birth, at least one of the parents had legally resided in Germany for 8 years or an unlimited residence permit for three years (Howard 2008). Germany has therefore long evaded the issue of cultural pluralism, considering itself a ‘homogeneous’ nation capable of ‘hosting’ immigrants, but without considering them part of the nation. The numerous immigrants from rural areas of Turkey and several southern European countries were considered guest workers or *Gastarbeiters* and were viewed as temporary residents who were expected to return (Mitra, 2022). Multiculturalism has primarily been interpreted as an ideology foreign to German political and cultural history. The compass that has oriented the policies aimed at managing cultural difference is that of German *Leitkultur* (leading culture), i.e. the promotion of an assimilationist approach to integration (Miera, 2007). However, there has been no shortage of multicultural policies ‘from below’. Integration projects and measures have been implemented at the local level based on specific needs generating multicultural policies without officially creating a unified multicultural approach (Schönwälder, 2010). Actions promoting the integration of migrants, such as German language courses and social assistance for foreigners, have been the result of pragmatic responses to existing circumstances rather than forms of deliberate implementation of a particular long-term strategy. Much of the work was delegated to welfare organisations, trade unions, churches, and migrant associations (Miera, 2007).

The multicultural debate in Italy has followed – albeit for very different historical and political reasons – a path similar to the German one. Italy has historically been a nation of emigration. Until the end of the sixties, migratory flows towards Italy were very low and mainly linked to migration from former Italian colonies. These flows mainly concerned people from Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, employed in Italy, especially, in domestic work (Marchetti, 2013; Andall, 2000). With the oil crisis, the resulting industrial crisis and the restrictive measures implemented by the traditional destinations of migratory flows in Europe – mainly France, Great Britain, and Germany – the arrivals of immigrants who come to Italy in search of employment are strengthening (Colucci 2018). It was only in the 1990s that migration to Italy became an evident phenomenon. In this period, immigration from North African countries was accompanied by a significant flow of people coming from the Balkan peninsula following the tensions that accompanied the dissolution of Yugoslavia and then from Eastern Europe following the fall of the Wall of Berlin and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. At the same time, connected to the expansion of globalization processes, migratory flows from Africa, Asia and Latin America also gained strength. Starting from mid-2010, the presence of immigrants has stabilized to about 8.5% of the population (Ismu 2024). Although immigration has become a structural component of Italian society, the issue of the necessity or not to introduce severe limits to the entrance of foreigners remains one of the

main nodes of political confrontation. The public debate remains monopolized by security issues, while an organic and informed discussion is missing on how to implement integration policies that allow coexistence in the differences.

«Both center-right and center-left governments have muddled through, oscillating between humanitarian and protectionist responses to the large numbers of migrants arriving via the dangerous southern sea passage, while leaving decisions on the form and degree of integration to the provinces. Indeed, Italy has had no clear stance on diversity. It does not celebrate cosmopolitanism through an explicit multiculturalist project, as in the UK and the Netherlands, nor has it taken a stance of “civic nationalism” along French Republican lines, which would insist on the equal treatment of citizens within a clear framework of Italianness» (Hill, Silvestri & Cetin, 2015: 227).

Italy struggles to consider itself a multicultural nation and foreigners residing for a long time and with regular residence permits are not fully considered part of citizenship.

As in Germany, in Italy citizenship is acquired *jure sanguinis*, that is, if a person was born or adopted by Italian citizens. The last general reform of citizenship dates back to 1992. The two main axes of the Law no. 91 are *ius sanguinis* and *ius conubii*. Citizenship can be requested by foreigners who have resided in Italy for at least ten years and meet certain requirements. In particular, the applicant must demonstrate that s/he has sufficient income to support her/himself, that s/he does not have a criminal record, and that s/he does not have any reasons that impede the security of the Republic. Another way to obtain citizenship is to marry an Italian citizen. In this case, citizenship is granted when, after marriage, a person has legally resided in the territory of the Republic for at least two years, or after three years from the date of marriage if resident abroad. If compared to the previous law passed in 1912, the 1992 reform has strengthened the privileges towards foreigners with Italian origins, appearing as an “ethnic law” (Gallo et al., 2006: 111). Concretely, the acquisition of citizenship by those who have even distant Italian origins became relatively easy; while its acknowledgement by foreigners without Italian or European origins has become even longer, more difficult, and discretionary, so much that it is possible to talk about the existence of a “legal familism” (Zincone, 2006).

The fate is not easier for the so-called second generations. Children born in Italy do not automatically have Italian citizenship. They can apply for it when they turn eighteen but need to fulfil a series of requirements in order to become Italian citizens: their parents had to be regular at the moment of birth and have stayed regular for the entire period between the birth and the majority of the son or the daughter; moreover, the second-generation children must prove they have been always living in Italy without any interruption. If so, they can declare their intention to become Italian citizens but only before they are nineteen.

These provisions for second generations do penalize children who end up paying for the “faults” of their parents: around 50% of foreigners who currently have a regular stay permit do have a previous experience of irregularity and it is not so rare that parents decide to raise their children in the country of origin, at least for a short period.

Meeting in Italian cities – so also in small villages – people with different shades in the colour of the skin, who dress in different traditional clothes, which speak a multiplicity of languages, or can choose among a wide range of ‘ethnic’ food and cultural events have become a constitutive element of daily experience. However, this experience of everyday multiculturalism (Colombo & Semi, 2007) is not accompanied by an open multicultural policy. The policies of inclusion, recognition, and enhancement of cultural differences as well as those that contrast discrimination and racism remain in charge of local institutions and, above all, voluntary associations (Ambrosini, 2013; Barberis & Boccagni, 2014). The issues relating to the cultural differences in Italian society – in addition to the issue of security, fuelled above all by the exponents of the right – have mainly concerned religion and school. In the first case, the debate focused on freedom of worship – especially linked to the possibility of building mosques or teaching religions other than Catholic in Italian schools. In the second case, the debate mainly concerned the insertion of the teaching of foreign languages – especially Arabic and Chinese – in lower secondary and high schools. In both cases, the lack of national regulation has led to a marked differentiation in the national territory (Campomori & Caponio, 2017).

Samuele Davide Molli, in his contribution *Migration and religious diversity in Italy. Exploring an evolving and contentious process*, shows how the advent of an unprecedented and increasingly complex religious pluralism can be considered one of the main transformations induced by migratory phenomena in Italy. A religiously diverse society is principally the result of immigrant minorities’ activism in recreating places where to address spiritual and social needs. Elaborating on results collected for a large research project, the chapter discusses the various ways in which immigrants have re-settled and re-adjusted their faiths in a new geographical and political context. It further investigates how State institutions and local communities have reacted to this historical change. The contribution highlights what Molli calls the «Italian paradox»: a diffused presence of immigrant religious minorities in cities and in various post-industrial scenarios who, however, frequently lacks an adequate juridical and social recognition.

The chapter *Multiculturalism in educational practices: the Italian case* by Angela Biscaldi and Anna Chinazzi raises the relevant question of how to promote inclusion and recognition of cultural differences in schools. The authors argue that the anthropological lens suggests a deconstruction of multicultural education that cannot be effectively pursued without critically analysing the meaning of culture. Taking inspiration from some ethnographic cases in the Italian

context, Biscaldi and Chinazzi identify three potential pitfalls associated with a naïve misconception of culture: generating excesses of culture, reifying culture, and overlooking differences within cultures. The assumption of a dynamic and constructivist conception of culture – in place of an essentialist and reifying vision of cultural differences –, the authors argue, recognizes the need to replace the ‘multicultural’ educational model with the ‘intercultural’ one. The chapter shows how Italian school policies promote an intercultural approach which can enable promising educational practices if practitioners share a critical understanding of its theoretical and axiological assumptions.

The reality of European multiculturalism

Even if multiculturalism does not enjoy an excellent reputation in the current European political-social climate, the question of the coexistence, with mutual respect, of cultural diversity in the public space constitutes a central and problematic issue. The current debate tends to find ways to overcome the contentious aspects of multiculturalism, at least in some of its interpretations more oriented towards the mere preservation of cultural differences.

The limits of the concept of multiculturalism and the critical debate that it has fuelled in Europe and, more generally, in Western societies are discussed in the contributions of Paola Rebughini and Enzo Colombo. Paola Rebughini in her chapter *Multiculturalism to the Test of Post/Decolonial epistemologies* underlines the historical connections that link multiculturalism in Europe with its colonial experience. The author highlights how the diversity that characterizes the debate on multiculturalism and the forms of implementation of multicultural policies in the European context is closely linked to the different colonial histories of individual nation-states. The adoption of a post/decolonial approach, Paola Rebughini suggests, going beyond a narrow methodological nationalism offers important critical tools to reconsider cultural differences or a blind and sterile alternative between subaltern integration and social balkanization. Enzo Colombo, in his contribution *Should We Give up on Multiculturalism*, critically evaluates the alternatives that are being proposed to address the limits of multiculturalism. The author highlights how the criticisms of the essentialist and reifying readings of cultural differences that have characterized some more superficial but very popular conceptions of multiculturalism lead the intellectual and political debate to highlight the aspects most oriented towards promoting real spaces for discussion, inclusion, and participation. Thus, alternative conceptual proposals emerge – interculturalism, cosmopolitanism, superdiversity, conviviality, just to name the most widespread – which aim to correct the limits of multiculturalism. While underlining the usefulness and richness of these alternatives, the contribution supports the importance of maintaining a strong link with the motivations and arguments that started the multicultural debate

which, rather than suggesting a mere preservation of existing differences, posed the issues of their recognition and their effective inclusion in the social fabric based on a critical review of the criteria for defining public space, citizenship and belonging.

Although multiculturalism is politically presented as a failed project, in reality, European societies cannot help but consider cultural difference as their constitutive and structural element. Despite populist and nationalist calls for a return to a reconquered – in reality never existed and only dreamed of – ethnic and cultural purity, European demography, economy and social life is characterized by the presence of different social groups with different cultural references. Although official policies tend to reject multicultural policies, normative and pragmatic interventions to recognize cultural differences and promote coexistence between different groups are widespread and constitute a central element of interactional dynamics in European societies. These are ‘bottom-up’ multicultural policies, rooted in local practices, and ‘soft’, more oriented towards building spaces for dialogue and inclusion rather than the mere protection of cultural differences.

The interventions aimed at the coexistence in public space of different groups with different cultural references mainly concerned (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010: 3):

a. education: changes to the curricula that would contribute to a better mutual understanding of different cultures; greater sensitivity to the specific values and beliefs of different cultures; greater tolerance in clothing and eating habits linked to specific religious rules; teaching the mother tongue of the parents’ countries of origin; specific support for learning the local language, when necessary;

b. religion: permission to follow the religious practices of the different religious communities, especially concerning holidays, places of worship, and burial rituals;

c. public recognition: with support for ethnic associations and the promotion of moments of meeting and cultural exchange; raising awareness among public service operators to avoid cultural misunderstandings; adequate space in the media for the voices of different groups;

d. fight against discrimination: with greater sensitivity in monitoring forms of discrimination and racism; awareness campaigns towards stereotypes and prejudices that paint minorities as inadequate and inferior.

It is not possible to identify a specific ‘European path to multicultural societies’ but, despite this, it is possible to grasp a progressive greater awareness of the cultural plurality that characterizes European societies. Avoiding a parodic and superficial multiculturalism that limits itself to exalting cultural purity by emphasizing the need for its preservation from contamination with other presumed pure cultures, European multicultural practices, developed above all

‘from below’ in the practices of daily interaction, have introduced greater sensitivity to the importance of cultures and the need for their adequate recognition for a more open and inclusive society.

Indian Multiculturalism

Even though, multiculturalism as a framework is emerging to be a significant political situation in many of the European countries and in USA, in India, it has evolved along with the freedom struggle due to various historical reasons. The ancient Indian thought had essentially libertarian perspective of considering entire world as one’s kinsman. Historically, various ‘*Dharmas*’¹ encouraged heterogeneity and involved conflicts and negotiation. Due to migration, war and change in the political economy, the Autonomy of different political formations and ideas in ancient Indian territories shows acceptance of multiple cultural groups with political power. The Indian cultural fabric from ancient times representing Brahmanism (based on idealist philosophy) and Buddhism (one section of Buddhism based on materialist philosophy) expanded the scope for diversity and conflicting ideas and politics (Chattopadhyaya, 2007). Even though India had Muslim rulers occupying many parts from 7th Century AD till Mid-18th Century AD, different cultural groups not only co-existed but took active part in the governance and various other aspects of the state. In fact, Hindus were given the status of protected persons in return for payment of taxes and loyalty to Islamic state. Even the social intercourse between Hindus and Muslims were never restricted except in occupying few positions in the government. The land revenue administration was in the hands of Hindus, and other cultural groups at the local level (Chandra, 2007).

During the colonial period there has been a constant dialectical interaction and critical relook into the existing cultural practices based on western enlightenment notions. This had many advantages of reviewing the existing practices, but at the same time imposed certain western cultural practices overriding the indigenous cultural practices. Thus such an exercise resulted in assimilation and also reform in Indian cultural practices. The new heterogeneity has led to qualitatively different way of life incorporating both western and India characteristics through negotiations and contestations. According to KN Panikkar, three cultural stream emerged due to this colonial interaction. The first was combination of indigenous and western cultural ideas, the second was disapproval of colonial culture and the third was critical interrogation of indigenous and western cultures to create an alternate culture. Thus the colonial interaction has led to both religious and secular nationalism, which is reflected during the

1 Moral way of living

independence struggle where both cultural and political nationalist were active in pushing their agenda in India (Panikkar 2007).

The conflict between the cultural nationalist, emphasizing on single cultural identity for India and political nationalist, who emphasized on multicultural society with single political identity has been the major struggle during independence struggle in India. The struggle was extended to Constituent Assembly (CA) of India as we witness in their debates. Cultural nationalist wanted an exclusive religious state, where the minorities will be either accorded secondary status or pushed out of the country over a period. Even though cultural nationalist wanted to revive the traditional Hindu culture, they were not completely opposed to British colonisers. This was a strategic move to counter the Muslim minorities by getting the state support. One of the Hindu nationalist leader Savarkar has created a conceptual framework for the political hinduism in the name of 'Hindutva' during the beginning of 20th century.

At the same time the political nationalist had the majority support in the Constituent Assembly (CA), where they took a secular position not falling into the narratives of cultural nationalist. This is in the context of partition of India and creation of Pakistan, a Muslim majority religious state. This secular position is still reflecting in Indian Constitution, which is neutral towards all religions, but at the same time respects all religions equally. Based on the colonial experience, the state took the power to intervene in religious affair to bring about necessary reforms along with protecting the rights of individuals and communities. Thus the whole multicultural framework has been embedded in various provisions of the Indian Constitution, which has been strengthened by the judiciary in the process of interpreting them over a period of time.

One question that comes to mind is whether multiculturalism is an essential pre requisite to the enjoyment of cultural diversity; or does it emerge to address conflicts and contestations that are an outcome of diversity? Both, one can say, depending on where we approach cultural diversity from. In countries like Canada and the UK, multiculturalism emerged to address contestations that cultural diversity posed; contestations that existing mechanisms of representation and plurality that are associated with a democracy could not address. Multiculturalism in these states was pronounced and adopted as an official policy and stand of the state – a stand successive government(s) had to adopt, imbibe and affirm. In countries like India the tumultuous history of social stratification on grounds of religion and caste meant that India would adopt the language of secularism and issues to do with cultural diversity would find resolution within the secular-democratic paradigm. It is for this reason that tracing the discourse on multiculturalism in India is an interesting exercise as one has a vast landscape to examine and analyse the multiculturalism framework. It is with this in mind that the four essays encompassing the Indian experience set out to do.

Dr.Venkatanarayanan in his chapter titled *Constitutional Identity vs. Cultural Identity: Emerging Citizenship Debates in India* traces the multicultural values historically and further tries to understand the contemporary period within the constitutional framework. This chapter traces the conflict between the cultural nationalist and political nationalist, which is very relevant for us to understand the contemporary contentious laws related to citizenship in India. The chapter traces the contradiction between the multicultural society and mono-cultural political emphasis in contemporary period, which is depriving the resources and opportunities for minorities.

Challenges to Multiculturalism in India's Context by Madhumati Deshpande reiterates the point made in the paragraph above i.e. the Indian Constitution and administration embraced multicultural practices even before multiculturalism became a popular ideology in academic and international circles. Known to be a land of diverse religions, languages, cultures and traditions, the sovereign state of India was birthed amidst this diversity with the sole unifying theme being independence from the British. The nation in the case of India existed before the state and was continuously reinforced through the creation and assimilation of identities. The Indian Constitution and its provisions therefore had an organic affinity to diversity and the outcomes were demonstrated through inculcating values and provisions like secularism, reservations, cultural and educational rights, the often turbulent official recognition of linguistic diversity, autonomous regions and the National Integration Council, to name a few. After enumerating the key characteristics of multiculturalism, Deshpande proceeds to demonstrate how the 'challenges' to multiculturalism in India are distinct from the European experience i.e. while the Europeans were mostly homogenous entities that confronted diversity due to the forces of globalisation and migration, India, essentially a heterogeneous nation faces homogeneity. She maintains that scholars have argued that multiculturalism is unable to address the 'deep diversity' in India and other regions of Asia and Africa, preferring a pluralistic approach to managing diversity. The article summarizes some key challenges to managing cultural diversity in India i.e. the linguistic reorganization of states that recognised language as a way to carve out states within the Indian federation; internal migration and the hostility outsiders face with respect to local language speakers, problems of sign boards, voters lists etc in border states. Add to this, the provisions for autonomous regions to tribal groups that encourage an ethnic influence upon our federal system. The caste system, economic disparities based on regional, religious and caste lines and the weakening of toleration, in particular to do with religious diversity, has meant that India is moving towards a more homogenizing identity to seek out the unity that is increasingly questioned by diversity.

Ardra N.G. engages deeply with the phenomenon of language and language diversity in India in the chapter titled, *The Language Question: Politics, Policy and*

Possibility of Multilingualism in India. As the title suggests, the key is to explore the possibility of multilingualism in India and the essay examines some such state policies. Ardra maps the importance of language in theory, drawing from Habermas, Bourdieu, UR Ananthamurthy and Kymlicka positing language as a medium of mediation and reconciliation, a means to rational and non-violent negotiations and the core idea that speech is what sets humans apart, making language rights central to the paradigm of ethno-cultural rights. For Bourdieu, language is embedded in social and political contexts and should not be viewed as a standalone when looking at language policy and education. Ananthamurthy would argue on grounds of syncretism, which is amalgamation of various cultures and Bhakti movement, which challenged the dominant narratives, and assert that the demise of multilingualism in colonial India was due to standardisation and homogenisation undertaken by the imperial apparatus. The chapter seeks to focus on three distinct aspects of the language question in India i.e. language as a unifying factor in post-colonial partitioned India, language as a distinct and coherent identity strong enough to be the basis of federal reorganisation of states and the complex relationship between education and language i.e. the medium of instruction.

Malavika Menon's *Multiculturalism Institutionalised: Perspectives on Article 30 of the Indian Constitution* examines in particular the accommodation of the Indian state vis-à-vis minority education through the constitutionally recognised fundamental right of Article 30. This provision gives the right to religious and linguistic minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. This was an explicit recognition by the nascent Indian state of the cultural minorities in India – and much like multicultural theorists like Kymlicka and Parekh argue – of a liberal state embracing plurality and diversity. After a discussion on the theoretical framework offered by multiculturalism, Menon walks us through some key arguments debated in the Constituent Assembly. These debates that touched heavily upon religion were discussed largely within the framework of secularism than multiculturalism; hence positions on cultural and religious rights looked at the religious vs. secular dimension in the field of education with an obvious resistance to the former. The essay proceeds to demonstrate the tensions, contradictions and predilections in the debates in the Constituent Assembly in India and in the Supreme Court thereafter. The select court cases examined highlight the problems in recognizing and negotiating diversity. It looks at questions of assimilation v. autonomy in the field of education albeit through the 'establishment and maintenance of educational institutions of their choice'. While this appears as a straightforward provision, the Courts have been presented with petitions from minority institutions since the time of independence that have addressed contentions and concerns ranging from state recognition, affiliation, autonomy, withdrawal of recognition, state interference in management and a host of other concerns that have led

the Courts to define and redefine the scope of Article 30. To draw from the conclusion, the essay has attempted to show how multiculturalism in India can be examined through the prism of the secular and how secularism guided the language and discourse on minority rights.

Conclusion: Multiculturalism in Contemporary Period

India and Europe, despite having different historical paths, today find themselves facing similar problems regarding the possibility of developing inclusive societies, capable of integrating diversity and difference in a context of democratic participation in common social and political life.

India had to face – well before the multicultural debate was consolidated in the West – the question of including cultural difference in the definition of national unity. How to implement a community united by principles of equality and cooperation starting from the multiplicity and richness of the historical and cultural experiences that characterize the Indian sub-continent. The central point of the multicultural comparison was the effort and need to build unity, solidarity and a sense of common belonging starting from the recognition and vitality of cultural differences. In many respects Europe has had to deal with an inverse problem: how to recognize the plurality and multiplicity of cultural differences starting from a deep-rooted idea of internal homogeneity which constituted the ideological and rhetorical basis of the formation of European nation states. A narrative of homogeneity and cultural purity which has favoured both internal cohesion and competitive distinction with other European states, but which is unmasked in its claim to naturalness by migratory phenomena and globalization processes.

Both India and Europe found themselves having to develop effective concepts and policies to foster societies capable of living not only *with* difference but, above all, *in* difference.

Although the problem of how to coexist in a democratic way while respecting mutual differences is central in both contexts – and in reality is a central problem for any perspective of an open and democratic society – the idea of a multicultural society is increasingly subjected to criticism from a return to the scene of rhetoric that places in the foreground the themes of national unity and cohesion, respect for the rules and the exaltation of a presumed historical-cultural purity to be preserved from the threats of contamination and colonization by aggressive minorities. The current debate seems more oriented towards deconstructing an imaginary multiculturalism, understood as a rigid protection of the cultural differences of minority groups to the detriment of the survival of the cultural homogeneity of the dominant group, rather than addressing the difficult question of an effective recognition of cultural differences within a shared vision of common destiny and political unity.

However, despite the populist tendencies and identity closures, more than a generic and unappealable “death of multiculturalism”, the current debate seems to decree the unsustainability of multicultural societies that solve the problem of recognizing differences supporting either their isolation or mutual struggle. In fact, the central question posed by the multicultural debate does not seem to be “the defence of cultural differences”, but rather a public reflection on the power of defining the rules of common coexistence and on the effects that decisions taken in this field can have on the most vulnerable individuals and groups. Thinking about possible multicultural societies does not mean trying to escape change, withdrawing into the protection of the status quo or in a nostalgic attempt to restore presumed homogeneous communities of the past. Rather, it means dealing with the complexity and variability of the present, in awareness of the socially constructed nature of the categories we use to define who is the same and different, native and foreign, citizen and alien, and, therefore, taking responsibility for the effects in our lives and in those of others of these constructions. More than defending differences, the multicultural debate raises the question of how to imagine a more equal society, without pursuing the myth – which has proved tragic many times in history – of a “pure”, homogeneous community, free from variability, complexity and change.

The present debate with regard to multiculturalism has to be located within the larger neoliberal framework, where the withdrawal of state has led to more cultural conflict as every group is fighting for their survival. The welfare state model in India and Europe has strengthened the multicultural framework, but this has come under threat after the implementation of neoliberal policies. Neoliberalism is considered as ‘Total Ideology’, where it wants the individual and social relations based on entrepreneur values. Market based entrepreneurs have to take risk and also personal responsibility for the success and failure without depending on the state. This has opened the struggle for resources and opportunities among different cultural groups. In Indian context, the increase in the religious, caste based and other ethnicity-based conflicts can be understood from this framework. There is a perceptible increase in this conflict after adoption of neoliberalism in India.

The European experience is comparatively different and the recent migration towards European countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America has a historical context where many of the European countries were involved in these countries as colonisers. The perpetual conflict between many cultural groups within these countries, that are majorly funded by the western countries, has obstructed the development process. This is resulting in huge migration towards developed countries in search of better life and opportunities. The present neoliberal regimes in European countries were not able to manage the impact of this migration as already the state is withdrawing from many welfare initiatives in these countries.

Starting from profoundly different historical contexts and experiences, Europe and India are committed to finding solutions to living together in difference. The comparison between the different ways in which, in the two contexts, India and Europe have tried to imagine and implement forms of coexistence in the public space that recognize commonality and solidarity, and, at the same time, respect difference is certainly a source of interesting questions and suggestions on how it is possible to think and implement a multicultural society. The contributions presented in the text do not intend to represent a unitary nor, even less, exhaustive framework of multicultural issues in India and Europe. They intend to contribute, through a critical review of the theoretical debate in the two contexts and concrete examples of policy implementation, to illuminate different aspects of the current multicultural debate. The contributors have different disciplinary expertise and research interests: anthropology, sociology, political science and international studies. The multidisciplinary perspective is another important contribution of the volume. It shows how multicultural issues require rich and articulated theoretical tools to manage the richness and complexity of living together in difference. As a whole, the volume intends to contribute to broadening the scope of critical engagement on multicultural issues in Europe and India, which can help us to strengthen cultural diversity for a better future of a peaceful society that welcomes diverse populations.

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PART I – MULTICULTURALISM UNDER SCRUTINY

Chapter 2

Constitutional Identity vs. Cultural Identity: Emerging Citizenship Debates in India

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Abstract

Even though the debate regarding multiculturalism took centre stage in European countries by mid of 20th Century, the Indian Constitution enacted in 1950 has prominent features regarding multiculturalism reflecting the historical inclusive nature of Indian society. After independence in a conflict between political nationalist and cultural nationalist, led to changes in legal framework with regard to constitutional identity of citizenship in India. The frequent changes in the citizenship acts in India reflect the changing political conditions and its implications. The recent Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 has created more political struggles as the cultural nationalist vision of creating an exclusive nationalist discourse got strengthened by this amendment. This paper will explore these changes to understand its implications in India.

Introduction

Indian society is varied, mixed and diverse accommodating various social identities cutting across religion, caste, ethnicity, language and other distinctive social identities. Historically due to migration and various interventions, every identity has institutionalized itself through their cultural and social practices gaining its own cultural and political space. Thus, rather than tracing any single identity for the people of this land from history, which is difficult to discern, a multicultural identity has to be developed to build a stronger and united political unit. The contested nature of citizenship in contemporary India due to various political reasons has not only excluded people based on religious identity, but also created fear for different cultural groups. Various dimensions of

contestations include citizenship as a legal status, as a bundle of rights and entitlements and also as a sense of identity and belonging (Jayal, 2013). The state's policies and its outcomes have a major impact based on citizenship as identity and entails right to access resources and benefits.

Idea of Citizenship

The political identity of citizenship overrides the cultural identity of different groups and giving equal access to rights and resources, assigns corresponding duties within a political community. Traditionally, the debates regarding citizenship revolve around two models: the republican and the liberal model. The Greek city states following republican model emphasized on civic self-rule, rotation of offices of power, where everyone gets opportunity to be ruled and also to rule. Aristotle's politics and Rousseau's "general will" reflect the republican model of citizenship rights. The liberal model emphasizes on extending the protection of law to everyone protecting their rights and liberties (Walzer, 1989). Liberal model focuses more on protection than participation, where even in recent times the citizenship debates in Indian context revolves around protection or exclusion of citizenship rights to diverse communities.

According to Kymlicka (2000), the idea of citizenship involves legal rights, political rights and representational rights. The legal status as enshrined in the constitution, guarantees civil, political and social rights. These rights are common to all the citizens cutting across the social and cultural diversity. The state not only guarantees these rights, but also provides remedy if any of them are violated. As a political agents, they claim their political rights through participation in the political institutions and the decision making process. Their whole identity is derived by being part or representing the political community as its member.

TH Marshall in his *Citizenship and Social Class, and Other Essays* (1950), based on the evolution of citizenship in England has identified civil, political and social rights as three important elements of citizenship. Freedom, liberty, equality before law, justice, property, speech, expression, contractual relations are some of the important aspects to be protected through civil rights. Political rights ensure participation and representation. The welfare and social security aspects of citizens can be protected by social rights. Thus the idea of citizenship has been mix of legal, political and social cross cutting various aspects and securing the rights of an individual in a political community. The idea of citizenship during the Indian independence struggle was divided between the secularist and communalist, where communalist favoured exclusive citizenship based on cultural identity, which was opposed by the secularist in the political arena and also in the constituent assembly.

Indian Independence and Citizenship Question

From 1885, when Congress party was formed, the national consciousness among the people slowly started rising towards demanding dominion initially and independence later. The western education played a significant role in orienting the freedom fighters with the western liberal political values, which enlightened them to slowly demand rights from the colonisers. After 1905, the Bengal partition, radical nationalist forces emerged based on the communal divide and finally culminated in the form of partition (Dincshahin & Arslan, 2013). The cultural nationalist insisted on dividing the nation based on religion, whereas the secular nationalist wanted to have a united nation, where religion will be separated from politics. Cultural nationalism was keen in excluding or creating a hierarchy based on the cultural identity, which will be detrimental to the minorities, who are part of this territory similar to the people belonging to the majority religion.

The secular nationalist, based their ideology on the geographical integrity of India including all ethnic and religious groups representing their beliefs and cultures. The national identity could be built based on diversity and such inclusive identity is the basis of nation building process in India. Thus all religious, ethnic and other social categories were automatically part of the political community without any exclusion. The cultural/hindu nationalist derived their source of identity from the majoritarian religion of Hinduism. Savarkar, one of the ideological father of Hindu nationalism attributed two important criteria for being part of the political community. They are 'Holyland' and 'Fatherland'. The fatherland explains the territorial inclusivity between the Indus and the seas and the holyland explains the religious inclusivity, where the community should genealogically trace their source of religion in this land. Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhist are part of the holyland as they trace their religion within Indian territory, but Christians, Jews, Parsis and Muslims were excluded from the political community as they trace their source of religion outside Indian territory. Except the extreme Hindu nationalist, other moderate Hindu nationalist doesn't want to exclude the Muslims, but want them to be assimilated within the larger Hindu civilization. The conditions for assimilation include accepting centrality of Hinduism, accepting Hindu mythological figures, critically look at Muslim rulers invasion and does not demand any special privileges (Varshney, 1993).

Thus the conflict between the secularist and the cultural/Hindu nationalist during the independence struggle played an important role in shaping the citizenship debate in India. The secularists were very particular in maintaining the non-religious nature of Indian state as people from different communities participated and sacrificed their life for the cause of Indian independence. The cultural nationalist, to a larger extent, not being part of Indian independence took

the historical arguments to exclude the minorities or degrade them to secondary citizen of the country. The Constituent Assembly, being a rational body representing people from different provinces and princely states supported the secularist position in accomodating all sections of the population and creating an inclusive India. Three important theoretical debates happened in Constituent Assembly with regard to the nature of political state. The first one was based on 'No Concern Theory', which wanted the state to practice a clear wall of separation between religion and state based on western secularism. Many people did not support this position, as religion being integral part of life of common people, it will be difficult to follow such strict separation in Indian context. The second theoretical deliberation was based on 'Religious Superiority Theory', where the members insisted on separation of religion from state, as religion being superior institution cannot come under the control of state. The third theoretical position 'Equal Respect Theory', which was widely accepted by all members insisted that state should give equal respect to all religions, but at the same time it will not have any religion of its own (Jha, 2002).

The secular framework adopted by the Constituent Assembly influenced all the provisions including citizenship rights in the Constitution. The partition of the country on communal lines and the status of minorities were key focus while the debates regarding citizenship took place in Indian Constituent Assembly. Even though partition made the debate more complex, the drafting committee and majority of members were clear in the approach to not associate religion with citizenship. The agreed provision were in line with secular constitutional principles, but also gave the parliament power to deal with all issues related to citizenship (Judge, 2022). During the Constituent Assembly debates, articles 5 and 6 were deliberated extensively. Article 5 lay down the conditions for Indian citizenship, which gave citizenship to those who are born in India, or either of parents born in India or who was a resident not less than 5 years at the commencement of the Constitution and not acquired citizenship of any foreign country. Article 6 (which later became article 11) empowers the parliament to make provisions regarding all matters related to citizenship (GOI, 2022). The Constituent Assembly adopted both principles of *jus soli* (birthright) and *jus sanguinis* (right through blood relations), which are reflecting in article 5 of the Indian Constitution. Thus the constitutional framework has laid a strong secular foundations for the future political state in India, but at the same time given the powers in the hands of the parliament to bring about any changes in future.

Post-Independence Developments

Indian constitution has incorporated provisions reflecting multicultural values based on the secular ideological stand taken by Constituent Assembly.

The affirmative action policies, reservation policies and protection of minority rights reflect these values. Even though separate electorate and reservations for minorities, which were there during colonial period, were discarded, the constitution protects the minorities and vulnerable groups through various provisions (Bajpai, 2019). This is reflected in the various legislative initiation by the government including the laws related to citizenship.

The Citizenship Act, 1955 was the first institutionalized legal framework based on Indian Constitution to define the procedures for acquisition and cancellation of citizenship rights in India. The act moved away from the principle of *jus soli* by removing the provision of citizenship by birth for those who are born after January 26, 1950. They will be considered for citizenship if any one of the parents is an Indian citizen. Various other ways of acquiring citizenship includes descent, registration, naturalization and incorporation of territory. The act empowers the executive to decide in case of doubt over anyone's citizenship. Also the act contradicted Foreigner's Act, 1946, which placed the obligation to prove on the individual whose citizenship is in question. The students' movement in Assam in 1980's has led to Assam Accord, which inserted Assam specific section 6A, which allowed those who migrated between 1966 and 1971 to be registered as foreigners. Those who migrated before 1966 were given citizenship and after 1971 were considered as illegal migrants. The 1987 amendment brought in the change that those who are born before 1987, were given citizenship based on the principle of *Jus Soli* and those born in 1987 and after were given citizenship based on *Jus Sanguinis* (Jayal, 2013).

The issue of migrants entering illegally from Bangladesh has been raised by the right-wing religion based Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for a long time and as it involves both illegal migration and the religious nature of migration. When they came to power, in the year 2003 an important amendment was made to the Citizenship Act trying to address this illegal migration of Muslims from Bangladesh. According to this amendment, anyone born before 2003, to acquire citizenship, either of his/her parents should have born in India. But those who are born after 2003, both his/her parents should be Indian citizen or one of his parents should not be illegal migrant at the time of his/her birth. Further amendment was made to section 6 of the act which deals with acquiring citizenship by naturalization. The original unamended section 6 gives citizenship to any person fulfilling required eligibility and not being citizen of another country as specified in first schedule. The government has specified the eligibility in the third schedule. If a person satisfies the eligibility/qualifications, he/she may be granted a certificate of naturalization according to third schedule. After satisfying the requirements of third schedule, he needs to take an oath of allegiance, based on second schedule to become eligible for citizenship. Section 6 also gives some exception. If a person is eminent, who has contributed in the fields of science, philosophy, art, literature, world peace or human progress, they can

be exempted from the third schedule (Ashesh & Thiruvengadam, 2017). The 2003 amendment for the first time introduced the world illegal migrants in the Citizenship Act. In the first schedule the words “who is not a citizen of a country specified in the First Schedule” was replaced by “not being illegal migrants” (GOI, 2003). The amendment specifically tries to restrict the movement of Muslims from the neighbouring countries to India adding a communal character to the existing citizenship act.

The citizenship Rules, 1956 were amended in 2004 to add more communal aspects by openly identifying the religious identity of the immigrants. Section 3(2) of the emended rules says that in case of minority Hindus with Pakistan citizenship, who have migrated to India more than five years back with an intention to settle down permanently, the collector of the district will be the authority to register such people as citizen of India. Article 7 of the Constitution deals with people who have migrated from Pakistan to India, without mentioning any religion, but the 2004 amendment specifically brought in the religious identity for acquiring citizenship and thus ignoring the Muslims (Jayal, 2013). The 2003 amendment granted overseas citizenship of India to persons of Indian origin, where they created a category Persons of Indian Origin (PIO). 2005 amendment reduced the requisite period for PIO from two years to one year and created another category Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI), where both these categories were merged in 2011. In 2015, the Citizenship Act was again amended to create a new term ‘Overseas Citizen of India Cardholder’ replacing the earlier terms. This amendment also relaxed the requirements of residence and gave scope for them to travel outside India even within the required one year of residence (Ashesh, & Thiruvengadam, 2017). The 2005 amendment did not create a dual citizenship, but only created a special status for persons of Indian origin. But according to this amendment the citizens of Pakistan and Bangladesh are not eligible to apply for OCI status.

Further the government of India made two significant amendments to Passport (Entry into India) Rules 1950 and Foreigners Order, 1948, which has further strengthened the movement from Jus Soli (Birthright) towards Jus Sanguinis (Right through Blood Relations) by including communities based on communal identity. These amendments were the foundation for the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, which created huge protests across India. The government amended Passport (Entry into India) Rules 1950 and included in the exemption clause 4 the following information:

“Persons belonging to minority communities in Bangladesh and Pakistan, namely, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians who were compelled to seek shelter in India due to religious persecution or fear of religious persecution and entered into India on or before the 31st December, 2014-

(i) without valid documents including passport or other travel documents; or

(ii) *with valid documents including passport or other travel document and the validity of any of such documents has expired?* (GOI, 2015).

Similarly it amended the exemption clause of Foreigners Order, 1948 and inserted in the exemption clause 3 the following details:

“Persons belonging to minority communities in Bangladesh and Pakistan, namely, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians who were compelled to seek shelter in India due to religious persecution or fear of religious persecution and entered into India on or before the 31st December, 2014-

(a) without valid documents including passport or other travel documents and who have been exempted under rule 4 from the provisions of rule 3 of the Passport (Entry into India) Rules, 1950, made under section 3 of the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 (34 of 1920); or

(b) with valid documents including passport or other travel document and the validity of any of such documents has expired,

are hereby granted exemption from the application of provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the orders made thereunder in respect of their stay in India without such documents or after the expiry of those documents, as the case may be, from the date of publication of this order in the Official Gazette”. (GOI, 2015).

The above amendments made in 2015 have laid a foundation for a very significant transformation of Indian citizenship from a secular perspective, which the Constituent Assembly members envisaged towards a religious nature, which violates the Indian constitutional ideology. As we have seen earlier, Constitutional makers adopted the “Equal Respect” theoretical framework for adopting secularism in India. This is different from western perspective, which had the “Wall of Separation” theoretical framework for its secularism principle. The multicultural nature of Indian society requires a neutral state without any religious identity, but at the same time due to majority of Indian being religious and religion being embedded within the cultural practices in India, it will be difficult to adopt a hand off approach. Thus the Constitution gave the state a neutral position, but at the same time it can intervene in the religious affairs to protect the fundamental values of the Constitution. In this regard, the 2015 amendment was a major deviation from the existing secular principle, and moved away from the secular principles of Indian Constitution. The Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 completed this task by bringing the religious principles as a basis from expediting the citizenship process for those who have come to India as refugees. This along with National Register of Citizens (NRC) has the potential to exclude people based on religion.

Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019

The provisions of Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 makes it easier for certain group of people in getting Indian Citizenship based on their religious identity. It also reduces the period of stay to claim citizenship through naturalization process based on religious identity. The statement of objects and reasons of the act states that since Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan have state religion, the minorities belonging to these countries from Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsis and Christian communities are facing religion based persecution and their right to practice, profess and propagate their religion is restricted. Since already the 2015 amendment to Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 and the Foreigners Act, 1946 has given scope for them to stay in India for a long term without being considered as illegal, now the present act will make them eligible for Indian citizenship. The Act further grants them immunity to stop any proceedings and make them eligible to apply for citizenship. The prescribed period for naturalization process to become citizen was also reduced from 11 years to 5 years for these religious minorities from outside India (GOI, 2019).

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in 2003 introduced the National Register of Citizens (NRC), which is being revived now. NRC was aimed to create a register of all Indian citizens. Initially it had the objective of controlling the Bangladeshi migrants to Assam, now it could be extended to cover all parts of the country. This has a scope for establishing 'Foreigners Tribunals' and internment camps to keep the illegal migrants. The present government wants to expand the same to whole of the country in the name of National Population Register (NPR) (Jaffrelot, 2020). Since the recent amendments to the citizenship act and rules have already exempted the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsis and Christian communities from the neighbouring three Islamic nations, the CAA and NPR will clearly exclude people belonging to Muslim communities. The persecution of Muslim sects within these countries, Rohingyas in Myanmar and Tamils in Sri Lanka are not taken into consideration as we find that such migrants include Muslims. This clearly shows a religious polarization of the legal framework in being exclusive in treating people and by excluding Muslims. The persecution of people happens based on different political reasons; religion being one the reasons, but these legislative initiatives cast doubt on the intention of the government in trying to fulfil its larger ideological agenda.

Observations

India, being a secular country with liberal constitutional framework accommodating various cultural groups, without prioritizing any group has been a successful experiment in treating all communities with equal respect following constitutionalism. India being home of migrants from different ethnic

communities, has always been a place for multicultural society. Rather than trying to find the national identity from the past through cultural revival, the constitutional makers have created a multicultural framework for the future generations to build their political identity based on the constitutional framework. The trajectory of changes in Indian citizenship laws shows that the state is slowly moving from Jus Soli, which is progressive and inclusive of all cultural groups towards Jus Sanguinis, which is exclusive favouring certain cultural group and excluding others. This cultural nationalist framework was opposed even during the independence struggle and also during the debates in constituent assembly, where majority favoured a secular state, insisting on political identity of citizenship rather than any other cultural identity. Over the years, there has been lot of polarization based on religious identity and also political mobilization based on cultural identity, which is now reflecting in the legislative changes in India. There could be various reasons for polarization including the adoption of neoliberal political economy in 1990. With neoliberal political economy, the state slowly started withdrawing from providing social security protections and the communal solidarity started strengthening. The present government with ethno-religious political background has been active in pushing for a state with cultural identity than the constitutional identity. This has not only invited huge protest, but also created fear in the minds of minorities. There is an urgent need for a course correction to revive the secular credentials of India through secular laws and institutions, which will serve everyone without discriminating anyone.

Such right-wing populist governments are found all over the world as a consequence of contemporary neoliberal political economy and its resultant widening inequality. The withdrawal of welfare state and insistence on self-reliance and non-dependence over the state has made many to fall back into their cultural identity. Thus after 1990's in India, when formally started adopting neoliberalism, the cultural identity and groups have become more prominent. This cultural mobilization is not limited to demanding rights and opportunities from the state, but also directed against other cultural groups by the political class, who wants to maintain the divide, to avoid extending benefits. The withdrawal of state and certain ideologically oriented policies has created more animosity among different cultural groups; either based on religion, caste, language or ethnicity, and has further influenced the secular nature of the state. There is an urgent need to reinvigorate the constitutional principles to reclaim the secular space in India.

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Chapter 3

Challenges to Multiculturalism in India's context

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Abstract

India is known world over for its diverse society that includes various religious, cultural, and linguistic varieties. Indian Constitution and the administration have attempted to promote multicultural policies even before Multiculturalism became a popular ideology the world over. However, as with other pluralistic, multicultural societies, India faces the several challenges to multiculturalism. The government has to balance the diversity with integration in the face of electoral politics and social issues.

Introduction

India is a multicultural country with diverse religions, cultures, languages, and traditions. The diversity has resulted from waves of migrations along with the creation and assimilations of identities and cultures over centuries when a single nation-state as it stands today was not a norm. Independent India thus emerged with this diversity and one of the main unifying elements was the struggle for independence. “The new country was then driven by a belief in a political construct, the idea of India, an idea that for decades animated the citizens’ efforts to unite their huge, diverse, and poor society and to transform it into a modern state fit to join the irreversible movement of world history” (Khilnani, 2012), Building of a nation uniting the diversity was not an easy task but was made much more easier by making the colonizers the common enemy. The Indian Constitution, adopted in 1950, envisions a secular and inclusive society. While the term “multicultural policies” might have become popular in the

1980s around the world, in the Indian context, various constitutional provisions and government initiatives, which were instituted from 1950s, already were multicultural in nature with an aim to foster a multicultural and inclusive society. “Scholars have hailed the Indian Constitution of 1950 as a prescient model of multicultural accommodation for its recognition of a range of group-differentiated rights within a broadly liberal democratic framework” (Bajpai, 2019).

Some of the key aspects of these constitutional provisions and initiatives are secularism, reservation policies, minority cultural and educational institutions, official recognition of linguistic diversity and special provisions for certain states, such as the existence of autonomous regions and special provisions for states with a significant tribal population. There is also a National Integration council, which is an extra-constitutional body that includes senior members of the government and civic society, instituted to combat threats to the Indian multicultural society through communalism, regionalism, casteism and linguism. Most of these topics are examined in detail in other essays of this book. In this chapter the challenges to multiculturalism in India are examined.

Examining Multiculturalism in the Indian context

Multiculturalism is a sociopolitical philosophy and policy approach that recognizes and celebrates cultural diversity within a society. It emphasizes the co-existence of different cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups, fostering an environment where various communities and their traditions are valued and respected. The key principles of multiculturalism include:

1. **Cultural Diversity:** Multiculturalism acknowledges and appreciates the existence of multiple cultural identities within a society. It recognizes that people come from different cultural backgrounds, bringing with them unique perspectives, traditions, and practices.

2. **Equality and Inclusivity:** Multiculturalism promotes the idea that all individuals, regardless of their cultural or ethnic background, should have equal rights and opportunities. It aims to create an inclusive society where everyone feels valued and has the chance to participate fully in social, economic, and political life.

3. **Tolerance and Respect:** Multiculturalism encourages tolerance and respect for cultural differences. It discourages discrimination or prejudice based on cultural, ethnic, religious, or linguistic factors, fostering an atmosphere where people can coexist harmoniously despite their diverse backgrounds.

4. **Integration and Interaction:** Multiculturalism does not advocate for the isolation of different cultural groups. Instead, it encourages interactions and exchanges between communities to promote understanding and cooperation.

5. **Policy and Legislation:** In some cases, multiculturalism is also reflected in government policies and legislation that aim to protect the rights of minority

groups, prevent discrimination, and promote diversity in various aspects of society, including education, employment, and public services.

Multiculturalism is often associated with countries or regions that have a significant diversity of cultural and ethnic groups. It can manifest in various ways, such as the recognition of multiple official languages, the celebration of cultural festivals, and the implementation of inclusive educational curricula.

It's also important to note that the concept of multiculturalism has been a subject of debate in different societies. Critics of Multiculturalism such as Arthur Schlesinger and Brian Berry argue that it may lead to cultural relativism or the dilution of a national identity, while proponents assert that it enhances social cohesion and enriches the overall cultural landscape of a nation. Indian Scholar Dipankar Gupta while not opposed to the multicultural policies, feels that identifying and giving special treatment to minorities is not a one time process and that it is a continuing process. (Gupta, 1995) The interpretation and application of multiculturalism can vary across different countries and regions.

Multiculturalism in India is different from the multiculturalism that has overwhelmed the European society in contemporary times. While the European countries in comparison to India have largely been homogenous states, which are encountering challenges because of globalization and migration, India has been a heterogenous society that is now facing an effort at homogenization for better control over society and politics. There are scholars who have pointed that the concept of multiculturalism is inadequate for capturing the deep, multi-level diversity of the kind encountered in India and other countries of Asia and Africa. (Bajpai, 2019, p. 128). The preferred term to describe these non-western societies is pluralistic.

As a society that has been pluralistic since ancient period, India has adapted to a multicultural polity and society in the post-Independence period. There was a fear among certain scholars that democracy in India may introduce pressures towards equality and homogeneity in culture based on Tocqueville's idea of mass society. (Kaviraj, 2007, p. 247). However, the historical and economic circumstances in the post-Independence period produced distinctive political-cultural forms specific to different regions (Kaviraj, 2007). India, a diverse nation with various religions, languages, and ethnicities, successfully transitioned to democratic governance despite its complex social fabric. Economic and social disparities further contribute to regional cultural and identity differences. While India opted for a multi-ethnic and multicultural state structure over a unitary one, it continues to grapple with challenges related to inter-ethnic and minority group relations. (Nandy, 2003, p. 12)

While India has made progress in promoting multiculturalism and inclusivity, challenges and concerns related to religious and cultural tensions still exist. Efforts continue to be made to strengthen the fabric of unity in diversity and to address issues that may arise due to the diverse nature of the country. It's

important to note that the effectiveness and implementation of these policies can vary, and there may be ongoing discussions and debates about the best approaches to fostering a truly multicultural society.

Challenges to Multiculturalism in India

While Indian state has made significant progress in promoting multiculturalism, there are still many challenges that need to be addressed. Addressing these challenges will require a concerted effort from all sections of society to promote unity, tolerance, and understanding.

Some of the major challenges are:

Linguistic Differences: India is a country with a wide variety of languages, and linguistic differences have also been a challenge to multiculturalism. The language barrier has often led to misunderstandings and conflicts between different linguistic communities. Indian government tried to forestall such conflicting federal structure by dividing the country on the basis of language. Through major reorganization of territories in 1950s and 60s, the ethno-linguistic differences were given recognition through territorial divisions. This kind of accommodative, multicultural state building process has been heralded as the most effective method of managing conflicts that may have balkanized the new independent India (Bhattacharyya, 2003, p. 158). This linguistic diversity was also given protection under the constitution where conservation and cultivation of such rights are the fundamental rights of every citizen of India. Article 29 (1) says that any section of the citizens of India having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the fundamental right to conserve the same. (Basu, 1997, p. 380) However, because the provision of creating states is quite flexible, demands by certain ethnic or linguistic groups become more political in nature and the appeasement by the parties in the election year leads to divisions on the basis vote bank politics rather than actual or required recognition for linguistic minorities. For example the creation of new states such as Chhattisgarh, Uttaranchal and Telangana. Telangana state was created not on linguistic identity as Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are both Telugu speaking states. The demand for state division here was vote bank politics more than linguistic or group recognition.

One other challenge that crops up because of linguistic differences is also the backlash against non speakers of native languages. Globalization, IT revolution has increased the internal migration of population from all parts of the country in to major metropolitan areas. From time to time one notices the backlash against the migrants who do not speak the local language. There are several clashes over sign boards, voter lists and languages used in the border areas of the states. (Indian Express, 2023) (Times of India, 2021). Even the three

language formula in schools came under fire in southern India where the states felt that Hindi was being imposed on them (Deccan Herald, 2023).

Regionalism: India is divided into different regions, each with its unique cultural identity. The seeds of regional identity in India were sown during the independence movement. As regional princely states united with the Indian National Congress to become a part of independent India, a heightened awareness of regional differences and commonalities emerged, laying the groundwork for the development of distinct regional identities. Indian nationalism did not unite and subordinate established regional identities. A sense of nation and region emerged together, through parallel self-definitions. (Khilnani, 2012, p. 153) Post Independent India united these princely states into the union with several accommodations for retaining the identity and diversity for a united India. "A flexible federal framework has allowed for the recognition of demands for autonomy by linguistic and tribal groups through a redrawing of state boundaries over time" and thus providing inclusivity and recognition for all identities. (Bajpai, 2017, p. 11). The story of statehood within the Indian federation since 1950 is the story of acceding to ethnic identity demands for political recognition, for autonomous powers within the federation, and for a more secure environment for the protection and maintenance of identity. (Bhattacharyya, 2003, p. 161). However, regionalism has also posed a challenge to multiculturalism, as it has often led to a sense of exclusion and discrimination against people from other regions. Multiculturalism promotes positive endorsement of cultural difference allowing marginalized groups to assert themselves by reclaiming an authentic sense of cultural identity. In case of India, the economic development, globalization which impacted the cities did not reach the hinterlands thus leading to unequal distribution of opportunities and resources. Apart from the linguistic diversity, the religious and ethnic diversities started becoming the divisive forces as nationalistic sentiments gave way to regional differences. Regional leaders vying for central positions took advantage of the situation to widen the differences. Some of these went on to become secessionist movements like in Punjab, Tamil Nadu and northeastern states. Others created divisions within the states based on ethnic differences. Efforts at national integration, like the setting up of National Integration Council in 1961 by Nehru to find ways and means to combat the evils of communalism, casteism, regionalism, linguism and narrow-mindedness, and to formulate definite conclusions in order to give a lead to the country, (Background note on National Integration Council, 2022) and several government led programs for national integration did not last long as regional disparities in terms of economic opportunities and political representation led to increased regionalism and cultural and ethnic consciousness. India recognizes and celebrates its cultural diversity. Various cultural institutions, festivals, and events are organized to showcase and preserve the diverse traditions, languages, and art forms across the country. Any

move to homogenise this diversity leads to conflicts: “multicultural societies... need to find ways of reconciling the legitimate demands of unity and diversity, of achieving political unity without cultural uniformity, and cultivating among its citizens both a common sense of belonging and a willingness to respect and cherish deep cultural differences” (Parekh, 1997).

Religious Tensions: India is home to several major religions, including Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism, among others. It is known for this rich cultural and religious diversity, making it a vibrant example of a pluralistic society. The coexistence of these diverse religious and cultural traditions has played a significant role in shaping the social fabric of India.

The Indian Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of religion and promotes the idea of secularism. The state does not have an official religion, and individuals are free to practice and propagate any religion of their choice.

While India celebrates its multiculturalism, it is not without challenges. Instances of religious tensions and conflicts do occur, but the overall narrative is one of coexistence and mutual respect. The country continues to evolve as a pluralistic society that draws strength from its diversity. Religious tensions have been a major challenge to multiculturalism in India. The country has witnessed communal riots and violence due to differences in religious beliefs. The conflict between Hindus and Muslims is one of the most notable examples of this.

Post independent Nehruvian idea of secular India lasted for 35 years without much opposition. The 42 constitutional amendment added the word secular to the preamble of the constitution albeit during the Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi and domination of one political party. Articles 25, 26, and 27 had already granted religious freedom to all religions including freedoms to preach, practice and propagate any religion. Challenges to this secular fabric came in the garb of the demand for Khalistan (Sikh State) and the rise of political parties promoting Hindutva. In the 1990s the secular nature of the congress party was being questioned and they were accused of appeasement of the minorities especially Muslims. In the post 1990s the rise of BJP on the Hindutva ideology led to changes to the secular state. “India has become, to some extent, an ethno-democracy given the impact of Hindu majoritarianism, which has reduced certain religious minorities to the status of second class citizens”. (Jaffrelot, 2010, p. 20) This also led to several communal riots across the country as the majoritarian government did not take effective legal action against the perpetrators nor did they condemn such actions. This was seen as appeasement of the organizations that supported the party through their social activism. The continuing, and even growing, marginalization of Muslims in the administration, in elected bodies and in the economy jeopardize the very multiculturalist aspirations of ‘the largest democracy in the world’. (Jaffrelot, 2010, p. 183).

Several instances of communal violence between different religious communities, often fuelled by political or socio-economic factors have been recorded

in the recent years. Riots and clashes between Hindus and Muslims, for example, have occurred periodically, leading to loss of lives and property damage. Recent riots in Manipur have also had tribal, religious undertones to it. Religious discrimination can manifest in social practices such as caste-based discrimination, where individuals from lower castes, often associated with particular social castes such as Dalits (formerly known as Untouchables), face discrimination and marginalization in various aspects of life. Not only does religion and caste discriminate against minorities and lower castes it also increases gender discrimination. Multiculturalism has been criticized for ignoring these social issues while highlighting accommodation for different cultures. Multicultural policies, often formulated as solutions to social problems, can paradoxically worsen existing inequalities. By singling out specific groups for special treatment, these policies can reinforce divisions and create new forms of discrimination, particularly in societies like India, where historical and systemic injustices persist.

Certain religious minorities, particularly Muslims, have reported experiences of discrimination in the form of profiling by law enforcement agencies, leading to unfair treatment and harassment. Members of certain religious communities may face barriers in accessing education, employment, housing, and other opportunities due to systemic discrimination or prejudices. Some laws and policies in India have been criticized for favouring certain religious groups over others or for being used to target specific religious communities. Examples include anti-conversion laws in some states, which are often criticized for disproportionately affecting religious minorities. Hate speech and propaganda can also create religious intolerance and incitement of violence against particular religious communities, either through traditional media or social media platforms. This is a common occurrence when a majoritarian rule picks a common enemy and assigns a particular religion to it in the name of national security. While multicultural policies are still held sacrosanct, the push for homogenization of society leads to othering of the groups in spite of the state policies.

Caste System. The caste system in India has posed a challenge to multiculturalism. The caste system is deeply ingrained in Indian society and has resulted in discrimination and prejudice against certain communities. Despite the constitutional ban on discrimination based on caste, the practice continues to exist in many parts of the country. Caste not only creates a hierarchical structure, but also influences the minority rights debate in India. The Constitution doesn't explicitly define "minority". This has led to debates about whether it should be based on religion, language, or other criteria. Affirmative action measures, such as reservations in education and government jobs, are in place to address historical socio-economic inequalities, particularly for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Democratic politics is supposed to empower the marginalized groups by creating competitive coalitions. However, if it is done only for vote bank politics without institutions

that provide for compensatory legislation and redistributive politics, caste conflicts and communal conflicts can overwhelm the society and polity thus politicizing Caste. (Kothari, 2007, p. 106) These special provisions to select groups incite some groups of people to unite together and claim marginalization and want to be included in these special groups such as OBCs. For example, the Patels of Gujarat and Jats in Haryana. Even though these two communities are the largest in respective states and have always been privileged, they claim that their representation in the government jobs is minimal and thus want reservations for these communities in government jobs. Caste thus creates a sense of inequality even though constitutional provisions of equality and rule of law are provided to all. Caste distribution across the states in India is not equal which in turn leads to inequalities in the developmental sector among different states.

Economic Disparities: Economic disparities in India have also been a major challenge to multiculturalism. The divide between the rich and poor has resulted in unequal access to resources and opportunities, leading to social tension and conflict between different economic classes. Religious discrimination and caste discrimination have always led to societal and economic inequalities. “Horizontal inequalities are embedded in social and political structures and affect citizens’ access to basic services. Inequality in India is about education, health, nutrition, sanitation, and opportunities as much as it is about rising income inequality”. (Himanshu, 2019). Multiculturalism, ideally, should promote equal access to opportunities regardless of cultural background. However, economic inequalities can hinder this goal. Discrimination, bias, and systemic barriers may prevent individuals from minority or marginalized cultural groups from accessing education, employment, housing, and other resources that are essential for socio-economic advancement. Concentrations of poverty and lack of economic opportunities in certain neighbourhoods or communities can lead to social and economic isolation, hindering integration and exacerbating cultural tensions. Economic inequalities in India are widening according to the study done by the UN University WIDER world project. (Himanshu, 2019).

Conclusion

The list of challenges discussed here is not exhaustive. Along with these challenges, there are many that are cropping up in border states like migration, trafficking and ethnic violence. India’s multicultural challenges may be different from European challenges as we are now seeing an effort at homogenization of Indian cultural identity. However this may not be as easily achieved. India’s pluralism that causes the problems may also rescue it from becoming a homogenous culture. European challenges are that their homogenous culture is facing challenges of heterogeneity which is not acceptable as easily. India and Europe have to learn from each other to manage their multiculturalism effectively.

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Chapter 4

Multiculturalism put to the test of post/ decolonial epistemologies

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Abstract

Multiculturalism is connected to the colonial past in many ways, even though this connection is not necessarily immediate. On the one hand, it can be considered a legacy of ‘colonial administration’, with economic, infrastructural, political and administrative consequences for countries that subsequently became independent states. On the other hand, multiculturalism cannot be fully understood, in all its potential and current difficulties, without taking into account the cultural and symbolic heritage of colonial past. The chapter discusses the role that postcolonial and decolonial thought – and more specifically post- and decolonial epistemologies – can have in framing the meanings of multiculturalism today. Moreover, the post/decolonial gaze, by shedding light on the western, modern and colonial genealogy of the very idea of multiculturalism, carries out a more overarching reflection on the need for a pluralistic and perspectival stance in social sciences.

The historical background of multiculturalism(s)

Multiculturalism is often perceived as solely a contemporary matter for discussion; but it is deeply connected to the colonial past in a number of ways. In the first place, it can be considered a legacy of ‘colonial administration’ (Gilroy, 2004; Wekker, 2016) and a past of forced, sudden and poorly trained encounters with cultural diversity. European colonial empires were involved in tremendous demographic changes, unprecedented displacements of people, and consequently in an acceleration of inegalitarian encounters among differences.

Indeed, colonial rule was characterized by everyday racist practices, but also by the concerned and utilitarian pursuit of ‘racial harmony’ (Rich, 1986), including a specifically coded mode of discourse on race, with important local variations. Over time and space, this has produced a sort of ‘political commentary’ on living amid incommensurable differences produced by the encounter of codes of segregation, negotiations with local populations, first forms of mutual recognition and attempts at reparation, claims of sovereignty and identity recombination. Hence, historically, multiculturalism and cultural hybridity have not just been the result of local contingencies and policies. They cannot be separated from the history of colonialism and its sequelae in modern and national approaches to multiculturalism through the more recent history of migrations (Gilroy, 2004).

In this chapter, I will discuss the role that postcolonial and decolonial thought – and more specifically post- and decolonial epistemologies – can have in framing the meanings of multiculturalism today. I will skip the complex and rich debates on the definition, transformation and different types of multiculturalism to which other chapters of this book are devoted. For the purposes of the present discussion, suffice it to take into account that ‘multiculturalism’ has in recent decades become a sort of buzzword which comprises different meanings and refers to different social practices. It intercepts different academic disciplines, has a variety of analytical levels, ranging from that of national policies to that of the construction of categorizations and identifications (Baumann, 2008). Consequently, it would make more sense to use this polysemic term in the plural: there are different practical forms and different analytical dimension of multiculturalisms (Colombo, 2015; 2021).

Actually, the coexistence among cultural differences that we can currently observe in most of the countries around the world is acknowledged and named as ‘multiculturalism’, regardless of the positive or negative evaluation given to that situation – even though the use of the term ‘multiculturalism’ is normally associated with a positive image of cultural diversity as an opportunity (Back, Sinha, 2016; Baumann, 1999). Yet multiculturalism can also be associated with the demand for the recognition of difference and consequently with the denunciation of discrimination and racism. In this case, the focus is on the issue of minorities, on their suffering of social and economic inequalities, and on their claims for democratic participation. In this regard, multiculturalism assumes different facets and can be given a variety of interpretations.

The association of multicultural issues with migration studies is more frequent than that with postcolonial and decolonial perspectives. The connection of migrations with multicultural encounters is evident and taken for granted; in this case, the discussion often oscillates between a focus on everyday problems and experiences of coexistence and a more normative focus on policies, for example on the need for affirmative action in favor of people who have mostly an

immigrant origin. In this regard, the debate on multiculturalism also highlights that there are important differences between the USA and Europe. While in the former case, the debate focuses mainly on native people and cultural minorities, and the specific situation of African-American citizens, in the latter case the debate on multiculturalism more frequently concerns the immigrant inflows that started after the Second World War, but only in some national cases in explicit relation with the colonial past (Gilroy, 2000).

On the contrary, the connection between multiculturalism and postcolonialism is not necessarily immediate, especially when multiculturalism is considered to be a local, practical and contingent social fact rather than a phenomenon whose genealogy can be traced back through complex historical events. The branch of the debate on multiculturalism that first highlighted an explicit connection with postcolonial and decolonial studies refers to the claims of recognition by indigenous populations in countries with a colonial past and which today are part of the 'Global North', such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand. These are then closely followed by countries in Latin America and some parts of Asia. In this case, the acknowledgement of living in a multicultural society has been related to the rediscovery, and the public denunciation, of the violence suffered by the indigenous people of these countries in many cases until very recent times. For example, the marginal social position of indigenous and Aboriginal people in these countries is considered as part of the discussion on multiculturalism in a historical perspective (Povinelli, 1998). Indigenous and Aboriginal people have a more immediate relationship with the history of colonialism than do immigrants and their descendants, whose relations with the colonial past can be more subtle, repressed or reinterpreted, and in some case absent (Hall, 1996; Hage, 1998).

Therefore, this chapter explores to what extent, and with which kinds of insight, half a century of postcolonial and decolonial thought has had an impact on the ideas and conceptualizations of multiculturalism. This matter will be investigated by starting from the epistemological claims put forward by post/decolonial literature, and by a generation of scholars interested in situating the coexistence of cultures in a global and historical set of power relations (Bhabra, 2009; 2014).

Post/decolonial analytical challenges

The rise of studies on colonality is temporally parallel, but not necessarily explicitly intertwined, with the rise of discussions on multiculturalism. Indeed, the focus of postcolonial and decolonial thought² has been on the genealogical

2 Hereafter, I will use the word 'post/decolonial', since it is a more appropriate term with which to underscore the differences internal to these bodies of study around the world. In

analysis of the western-centric epistemic monopoly of knowledge in all fields of research, but especially in history and humanities, philosophy and social sciences. The unveiling of histories and knowledge deliberately forgotten by western thought and academic disciplines goes hand in hand with the demands for the recognition of difference, and with the denunciation of a past of oppressions (Young, 2004; Spivak, 1999). In epistemological terms, the main concern of the post/decolonial set of approaches is to highlight how the understanding of the present is based on conceptual tools configured at a time when the only legitimated voice was the Western one (Bhambra, 2009).

This critical epistemological approach can be considered a sort of analytical precondition and premise for the claims of difference and equality advanced in current multicultural societies, but this relation is not necessarily explicit (Young, 2004). Indeed, while in post/decolonial epistemologies there is the clear aim to move beyond modern dualistic visions, for which there is an a-cultural, legitimated and alleged neutral ‘gaze from nowhere’ – that is, the western one – and a set of subaltern differences represented by the cultures and populations of previously colonized countries, in the case of multiculturalism this post-dualist aim is not always present. On the contrary, the local interpretations of culture in community life can be temporally flat and focused on contingent features and problems, and they may sometimes even adopt a dualistic perspective on social organization. Therefore, in its varieties of conceptualization, multiculturalism can be conceived also as convivial coexistence of differences that do not renounce dualistic relations with other differences but only claim equal recognition with them (Baumann, 1999). Consequently, it is necessary to understand the epistemological effort undertaken by post/decolonial approaches to dismantle such dualism, and then analyse the way in which this interacts with at least some interpretations of multiculturalism.

Taken together, post/decolonial approaches have a common core of critical observations on how Western societies imposed their system of domination and their epistemological canon, recasting local knowledge and determining the construction of knowledge in all the disciplines – from medicine to engineering – according to their interests (Dussel, 1995; Connell, 2007; Go, 2013). As a matter of fact, colonialism was not just a form of exploitation and appropriation of the resources of others; it was also a form of symbolic violence that imposed the Western world view as the only ‘true’ and ‘right’ one. In this way, the western hegemonic knowledge system was built also by appropriating the bodies of knowledge of colonized peoples and turning them into elements useful for the success of the western modernization process (Said, 1979; Santos, 2016; Go,

this chapter, there is no room for even a rough introduction to the different stances adopted by post/decolonial approaches, to which I will refer mainly in terms of their shared features and their analytical relations with multiculturalism. For an introduction to of these different stances see Colombo & Rebughini 2022.

2020). Within the western world, this utilitarian use of knowledge reduced the potential of the plurality of voices revealed by the process of globalization, and it provoked the internal contradictions and binary visions that are still at the basis of current controversies on multiculturalism.

As Bhabra (2009) noted, key notions of modernity such as progress, development, science or emancipation were put at the service of the identity and interests of mostly just one social category, the male, white, Euro-American, bourgeois citizen. Other knowledges, with all their potential, were excluded from the logic of the Western epistemological domain if they could not be bent to the purposes of this project (Chakrabarty, 2000). In colonized countries until recent times this often produced – especially among local ruling classes – a sort of ‘captive mind’ (Alatas, 1974) uncritical and mimetic of western models (Nandy, 1983; Fanon, 1986). According to the critics of these social processes, these hegemonized subjectivities were unable to achieve autonomy and independence because they could only use the language and the concepts of the dominators. Yet this produced also resistance, pride and forms of grievance, as well as a capacity to translate western epistemologies into the local situation and pass this knowledge from generation to generation.

It is precisely this historical process that produced the contradictions and the misunderstandings at the basis of the current discussion on multiculturalism (Pasha, 2021). The identities of colonized people, most of whose descendants later became immigrants in western countries, were frequently forced to make a dualist choice between becoming what the dominant model would like – that is, culturally assimilated – or claiming, in turn, a superiority founded in local tradition and valuing their own diversity. This created new structural forms of dualism and separation which generated prejudices and social discrimination that still characterize current multicultural societies and their cultural construction of otherness. No wonder that the persistence of this dualism is a core component of post/decolonial epistemologies.

Even though post/decolonial approaches are not directly interested in multiculturalism, their efforts to overcome a binary mode of thought have evident implications for the debate on multiculturalism (Appadurai, 1996; Go, 2013). The dichotomies under discussion are all those involving the cultural pillars of modernity, and not only that of cultural difference; that is, nature/culture; modern/traditional; civilized/savages; Us/Them; the West/the Rest; global/local, and so on. Binarism is considered as a reductive approach in front of the complexity of cultural encounters that followed colonization, and as a result of the power relations associated with it. In the colonial world and in its legacy, the logic of dichotomous thought consists in reducing complexity and variability to a series of oppositions in which one side assumes a positive moral value, considered to be sacred and superior, while the other is residual, profane and inferior. This ‘othering machine’, working at full capacity over three centuries,

created powerful identities, forms of inclusion and justifications for exclusion. The boundary that defines the binary distinction tends to create a sense of homogeneity and unity for everything that lies within that boundary and increases the sense of difference, distance, and threat of what is excluded (Bhabha, 1994).

The dichotomous thinking that always identifies a valuable side and a negative one is opposed to the proposal of a connected epistemology by post/decolonial studies, for which it is essential to re-characterize global culture in terms of relations, pluralism, hybridity and intersectionality (Colombo & Rebughini, 2016; 2022). The overcoming of a dichotomic approach is important in order to highlight heterogeneity as a basic category of social reality, and to introduce contingency and uncertainty into what the epistemic monism of the Global North tends to represent as sovereign, uncontaminated, and stable on the basis of established categories (Santos, 2007). This means not only recognizing the fluidity and instability of boundaries created to define dichotomies but also acknowledging the effects of the domination, exclusion and inferiority that such dichotomies define.

The relation with multiculturalism is brought to the fore precisely in the consequential post/decolonial reflection on identity conducted in post-dichotomic epistemological terms (Spivak, 1999). Outside a binary system and in a theoretical framework that recognizes connections and mutual influences, cultural identities are no longer an essentialized characteristic of subjectivity, but instead the mobile and continuously negotiated result of the ongoing relationships that are established with other subjects, other histories and other contexts. Identity becomes the unstable result of different forms of belonging and of the specific social position that is assumed in the temporary relationship (Gilroy, 2004). Post/decolonial thought highlights, of course, how identifications can be the result of oppression, but also of a subjective experience of hybridity, constant mixing, transformation as reactions to situations and contexts, to power relations and social positioning, genealogically rooted in the colonial history of cultural encounters.

The notion of hybridity has been a cornerstone of post/decolonial studies – especially in the interpretation of Homi Bhabha (1994) – and it is the notion that can more easily connect research around multiculturalism. The concept of ‘hybrid’ refers to specific social locations resulting from the intersections among different categorizations and identifications. But it also links the historical dynamic – the persistence of the past – with the spatial dimension. The hybridization process involves an encounter among different trajectories in a specific social space. Hybridity also enables a form of ‘border thinking’ (Mignolo, 2012): that is, the recognition and transformation of the hegemonic imaginary from the point of view of people in subordinate positions. Border thinking allows the adoption of an eccentric, oblique gaze that re-elaborates in

original terms – and from a subaltern standpoint – taken-for-granted notions, languages, rules, and hegemonic beliefs (Lugones, 2010).

All this means that post/decolonial theory is not built only upon debates about the illegitimacy of colonial power and its long-lasting consequences. Rather the subterranean tie between post/decoloniality and multiculturalism concerns the way in which past colonial administration, the moral justification of colonial expansion, eurocentrism, racialization and discrimination, dichotomic thinking and cultural habitus had an influence on the way in which the representation of the other – the immigrant, the native, the citizen of another colour – was intricately coded with consequences that have come down to us (Gilroy, 2004). Focusing on continental Europe, in the next section I explore how this influenced the approach to immigration and descendant of immigrants, particularly in regard to the idea of ‘integration’.

Multiculturalism and coloniality across migration studies

Debates on multiculturalism are often normative and associated with national traditions; this happens because their implicit background refers to the notion of the ‘integration’ of immigrants in western countries. An interesting intersection between post/decolonial thought and reflections on multiculturalism concerns exactly this issue: the social integration of immigrants from postcolonial countries. Indeed, many perplexities about multiculturalism are due to a belief that social cohesion is being undermined. This exacerbates fears about the role that immigrants can have in this weakening of social stability and ultimately of social integration (Appadurai, 2006). It is accordingly believed that allowing minority groups to maintain their own cultures and identities can encourage ethnic separatism; but also acknowledged are the difficulties that all democracies face in providing ethnic minorities with concrete protection against discrimination and social inequalities (Joppke, 2004).

In Europe, France is certainly the country where such distrust has always been expressed most clearly, even in the years during which the discussion about multiculturalism was more optimistic, i.e. the 1980s and 1990s (Wieviorka, 1999). Later, and especially after 9/11, the voices underscoring the failure of multiculturalism policies to integrate immigrants became stronger in the USA and elsewhere. In different ways, and with different tones and effects, multiculturalist policies were accused of fostering separation, with parallel and self-referential communities, rather than social integration and equality (Benhabib, 2006; Alexander, 2013). These limitations were also associated with a danger for democracy and a risk that western societies might become balkanised. Again, France has been the main proponent of the thesis that the western values of freedom, democracy and universalism should be privileged with respect to preserving the traditions of single communities, and for which policies for their

integration into the host society should concern not only economic and political inclusion but also an individual commitment to a given national belonging (Touraine, 1997; Joppke, 2004). In order to be integrated, migrants must show their desire to be so; and they must accept the sacrifice of giving up aspects of their own culture in exchange for the universal rights and privileges of living in an accomplished democracy.

Even though the studies of many scholars have profoundly changed the meaning of integration, dissociating it from the idea of a straight-line process of acculturation, this notion continues to circulate, especially in quantitative studies, and as a sort of counterbalance of self-referential minority cultures (Lutz, 2020). In many ways – and in spite of the risks of eurocentrism and assimilationism (Back et al. 2012) – a systemic and functionalistic approach to social cohesion still characterize the debate on the ‘integration’ of immigrants. For example, during the 1990s a series of extensive, quantitative and qualitative, studies on the children of immigrants rediscovered and re-examined the notion of ‘assimilation’ (Gans, 1997; Portes, 2001) which they distinguished from the idea of ‘acculturation’. While taking globalization and pluralism into account, the idea was to analyse ‘integration’ as a form of progressive participation in socio-economic life as a spontaneous and ordinary – and often unintentional – process. Yet, the cultural model into which the notion of integration is carried out continued not to be under discussion or under analysis in its genealogic origin.

Inevitably, also the focus on a binary opposition between assimilation and exclusion has become a paramount critical target of post/decolonial theory, whose epistemological core is at odds with a centralized idea of inclusion. In this respect, the post/decolonial approaches have many affinities with other perspectives, such as the *transnational* one, which has also challenged the methodological nationalism behind the reference to inclusion. It has done so by criticizing the foundational reference to the nation-state, and by focusing on actors in a context of ‘everyday cultural mix’ where they can circulate among plural references of belonging and transnational connections (Anthias, 1992; Schiller et al. 1992; Baubock, 2003). Yet the post/decolonial perspective extends the horizon beyond the western migration frame by claiming that inequalities inherited from coloniality can shape different accesses to ‘transnational circulation’.

As a matter of fact, post/decolonial approaches, with their effort to deconstruct dualisms and monolithic approaches, have underscored the intrinsic internal pluralism of the apparently neutral process of integration, as well as its implicit systemic constraint. This has paved the way to a more attentive analysis of multicultural processes. By highlighting the non-existence of a neutral reference and the power relations behind taken-for-granted processes of integration, post/decolonial epistemologies offer stimulating analytical bases on which to discuss the multifaceted nature of multiculturalism.

But the role of post/decolonial studies in this debate is not always evident, especially because scholars of, and experts in, multiculturalism are not always familiar with post/decolonial studies, and vice-versa. Nonetheless, post/decolonial studies can furnish an epistemic insight into the issue of the integration of immigrants and on how it has been discussed in migration studies and multiculturalism studies. This is especially evident if we consider coloniality in a broader sense than the simply temporal one, and as a phenomenon not exclusively related to a more formalized colonial history.

Such critical discussions of the notion of 'integration' come from the starting point of post/decolonial studies as archive of critical investigations, for which decolonization is far from being over. Following this approach, we instead face a historical configuration where the legacy of colonialism persists in new forms in economic and international relations, wars, migrations, environment exploitation, as well as, more broadly, in epistemological approaches. As Spivak puts it, we live in a 'postcolonial neo-colonized world' (Spivak 1999). This approach is based on analysing the entanglements between the stories of 'subalterns' and 'rulers', without separating them, but focusing on what results from the relations among them. The result is an epistemological framework that deconstructs in a few steps the analytical premises of many common-sense approaches to multiculturalism and its alleged problems. This approach also takes account of the fact that new protagonists of forms of material and symbolic colonization have appeared on the global scene, complicating these relationships. The latter are no longer limited to the legacy of the classical colonial past but include new power relations among the new, non-western, actors of globalization.

A first epistemological step is based on the deconstruction of the monolithic and western-centric idea of migration, with its ongoing classical methodological nationalism: that is, its approach focused on the nation-state (Beck, 2007). Most of the postcolonial positions recall that the notion of 'migrant' is the result of a Hobbesian vision of the state that started with western modernity, and for which a community of interest and identity can be achieved only by identifying a naturalized externality (Mbembe, 2000; 2013). Coloniality has been the fundamental cornerstone of this political construction of the modern othering-machine (Spivak, 1999).

It was with the industrial and colonial era that the nation-state developed its capacity of governing 'principles of mobility': to control mobile bodies, immigrant workers, arrival of population in the towns, as well as differentiated access to modernity in terms of gender, class and colour. This seems still evident today, in a historical moment of crisis of globalization and 'return of the state' in terms of self-referential defence in a context of geopolitical tensions. In a variety of ways, post/decolonial approaches have shed light on the traces of coloniality within this self-referential vision of the state, as well as in classical

concepts and categorizations of migration such as the notion of integration, and the idea of a teleological process of integration into a given and unchanging national area (Chatterjee, 1993; 2012).

Secondly, with its genealogical perspective on the history of globalization processes, the post/decolonial gaze has supported a superseding of the classical 'spatial' and 'temporal' dualistic dynamics of migration studies, such as those of a place of provenance and a place of arrival, a culture of origin and a culture of adoption, as well as the one-way stages of integration. This has complexified the classical and abstract representation of the migrant who crosses nation-state borders in a movement from the 'less developed' areas to the 'richest ones' (Bhambra, 2014; Dussel, 2000). All this highlights that there is not just 'one kind' of migration, but instead very different structural conditions in which migration occurs, and that migrations are often gendered, racialized, and sexualized, producing specific social locations and hierarchies. Because global connections were forged through colonialism, and continue to operate through forms of methodological nationalism, the ways in which migrants are described in political and social life can still incorporate colonial language and habitus.

Moreover, the post/decolonial perspective has also brought to the fore evidence of migrations that have happened (in the past and today) outside the Global North, and that are often important internal migrations provoked by power relations among regions in unequal conditions. In this case, the postcolonial analysis points out that the nation-state as a 'political entity' – imposed around the world after decolonization – tends to work with the same logic everywhere, for example in areas of the world where people were accustomed to circulating among regions that are now different nation-states (Chatterjee, 2012). Hence, while the 'coloniality of power' originated in the West, as a societal frame of inequality, it is nowadays present also in non-western countries, fostering local forms of racialization beyond the 'white/other' dichotomy (Quijano, 2007).

Thirdly, the post/decolonial perspective also offers tools with which to approach a more subjective side of the tension between pluralism and integration. In this case, the post/decolonial dimension is mainly symbolic: it is a reference to frame the everyday experience of one's own difference and subalterity precisely because the 'postcolonial subject' is mainly a subject of othering processes. Even though this happens from very different social positions and experiences – such as those of asylum seekers, indigenous subjects, descendants of immigrants, or descendants of enslaved people – recognizing oneself in a frame of 'postcolonial condition' can be a way to give a collective and share meaning to a subjective experience of oppression and to acknowledge that one's own stories are missing from mainstream social narratives. This fosters the capacity to develop a voice in the public space and in research itself. Thereby, the migrant, the descendant of migrants or of native people – as a

postcolonial subject – becomes an ‘active historical subject’ (Mignolo, 2000), and expresses a contextualized form of embodied critical knowledge (Connell, 2007). Indeed, for a long time, the agency of the postcolonial/immigrant subject has been overshadowed by research focused mainly on issues like integration and assimilation, whose theoretical origin is clearly situated in a functionalist and deterministic vision of society.

Hence, the convergence among migration studies and post/decolonial studies can help to deconstruct ontological categorizations and to de-essentialise the notion of integration and of immigration itself. It can shed light on the danger of a parochial approach to migration research that reproduces the standpoint of the western societies, assessing phenomena in terms of costs and benefits, assimilation and exclusion, demography and fertility, by fostering – on the contrary – an encounter between private experiences and public claims, individual standpoints and collective policies. Looking at migration studies, and at the related issue of multiculturalism, from this perspective is a way to consider them as not only an area of empirical descriptive research, and to include them in a wider frame of ‘global social thought’: that is, in the debate conducted by post/decolonial theory in regard to the western origins of mainstream theoretical references, and to their intertwining with coloniality. Particularly, this can furnish insights into both the ‘local situatedness’ of categorizations and the ‘historical and extra-territorialized’ dimension deriving from the legacy of the colonial construction of knowledge and consequently of categorizations and identifications.

To sum up, in their epistemological approach to cultural difference, post/decolonial approaches introduce *perspectivism*, rather than *relativism*. This explains that it is not possible to assume knowability from the same ‘objective’ standpoint, in search of a totalizing, abstract, trans-societal theory of who is included to a given model. Such totality fails to acknowledge the socially-situated (and always incomplete) character of all knowledge, categorization and self-representation. Globalization, migration and displacement have highlighted that social knowledge does not come from nowhere. It is always socially situated; and it is shaped by specific social contexts. Overcoming this dualistic vision means overcoming the idea that the West – or any other geo-cultural point of view – is always *culturlessness* and so is the agency of its subjects, while the ‘other’ represents a ‘difference’. This standpoint can foster the de-essentialization of the ‘othering machine’ with which the representation of the other is produced in current multicultural societies.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the way in which the common epistemic focuses of the range of post/decolonial approaches can highlight some of the

controversies concerning multiculturalism, such as that of integration and the recognition of plural differences. It has been noted that the analytical starting point of post/decolonial studies and multiculturalism is different. The former have a genealogical and epistemological perspective focused on the construction of knowledge about cultural diversity; the latter focuses mainly on the management of cultural diversity within the framework of migration flows, diasporas, and everyday life among different cultural communities in given local and national contexts. At the same time, ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ ideas of multiculturalism often depend upon the kind of colonial past of a given country – besides the historical elaboration and public discussion of that past – and upon the connected historicized forms of reification of difference (Colombo & Rebughini, 2012). By studying the dynamic of the approaches to multiculturalism – the way in which it is named, the normative features, the political and public discussion – it is possible to highlight a connection within the legacy of colonialism, and the expression of its legacy in new forms: for example, the way in which immigrants and their offspring are present in economic, political and everyday life; the way in which they are categorized; the extent to which they are perceived in a dualistic way in terms of ‘us’ and ‘them’, or the extent to which it is possible to produce hybrid identifications.

Post/decolonial approaches with their effort to overcome methodological-nationalism can furnish epistemological tools of critical reflection with which to deal with the controversies internal to multiculturalist studies, such as the effort to overcome the idea of the immigrant as a naturalized externality and a result of a long-lasting othering-machine, or the idea of integration as the only alternative to social balkanization. Moreover, the question of ‘Who is speaking for the colonial past?’ (Chakrabarty, 2000) can highlight the genealogy of the construction of the categorizations of cultural diversity, fostering a non-essentialist approach to them; this can shed new light on the management of such cultural diversity in the local policies of multiculturalism. As we have seen, distrust of multiculturalism is related to the way in which knowledge about cultural difference has been produced over time, to questions about who is entitled to produce such knowledge, who counts as a ‘legitimated *knower*’ and the extent to which the knowledge produced is a tool of hegemony. This typical post/decolonial reflection can help to overcome positivistic visions of integration and social cohesion and to give more tools for analysis of the challenges that current democracies have to face. In sum, the post/decolonial gaze, by shedding light on the western, modern and colonial genealogy of the very idea of multiculturalism, carries out a more overarching reflection on the need for a pluralistic and perspectival stance in social sciences.

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Chapter 5

Should we give up on multiculturalism?

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Abstract

The popularity of multiculturalism in political and media discourse has been high but short-lived. The chapter analyses the main criticisms advanced to the multicultural perspective and the alternatives proposed for a more organic coexistence in difference. The chapter critically analyses the ideas of interculturalism, cosmopolitanism, superdiversity and everyday multiculturalism. Despite the limits of a multicultural vision excessively based on the defence of cultural differences, thought of as homogeneous and stable, the chapter underlines how the basic claims of the multicultural proposal - inclusion and participation of minorities in social and political life; recognition and respect of cultural difference; fight against discrimination and racism; revision of the rules of common life - are still a valid and essential starting point for thinking about a coexistence in difference.

The ups and downs of multiculturalism

The question of how to ensure a safe and protected space for cultural minorities in democracy is as old as the idea of democracy itself. Cultural difference has always had an ambivalent place in democratic thought. It has been seen as both a resource and a problem. As a resource because difference and pluralism are considered the pre-conditions for freedom and agency. If people can choose among different perspectives, options, ideals and courses of action, they are really free to manifest their preferences and to act as autonomous individuals (Kymlicka, 1995). Only a society open to different voices and opinions is a guarantee against totalitarianism, fundamentalism, and intolerance (Benhabib, 2002). On the other hand, too much difference is often seen as the cause of

the dissolution of the social bond, as a threat to solidarity (Putnam, 2000). In this case, too much difference is perceived as preventing social cohesion and undermining the feeling of being part of the same community. It thus promotes individualism, selfishness, and opportunism or (even more dangerously) a clash between different groups with different, and incommensurable, values, and worldviews (Huntington, 1996).

The attitude towards the ambivalence of cultural difference in public life has often been radical, with one or the other of the two poles of the dilemma being strongly supported. The debate on so-called ‘multicultural societies’ in Western countries in the last forty years is a good example of this Manichean attitude.

The popularity of multiculturalism in political and media discourse has been high but short-lived. If at the end of the last millennium the multicultural society seemed the inevitable and desirable destiny of the development of Western democracies (so that, in 1997, Nathan Glazer could title one of his most successful books *We Are All Multiculturalists Now*), in the first decades of the current century there has been a rapid change of opinion. Multicultural policies have been accused of producing separation, hindering integration, and reducing social cohesion. In an apparently unstoppable crescendo, in the space of a few months the main European political leaders (German Chancellor Angela Merkel on 16 October 2010, British Prime Minister David Cameron on 5 February 2011 and French President Nicolas Sarkozy on 10 February 2011) stated that: «multiculturalism has failed and is dead». Although a series of studies (Vertovec & Wassendorf, 2010; Korteweg & Triadafilopoulos, 2015; Banting et al., 2023; Safdar et al. 2023) show how the implementation of multicultural policies continues to be a fundamental means – widely used by Western governments – to promote fair and effective integration policies, critical voices have spread and amplified to the point of constituting a new *doxa* which sees the ‘defence’ and ‘recognition’ of difference as a point of weakness and a threat to national identity. These criticisms have certainly been fuelled by some excesses and by an essentialist interpretation of cultural affiliations and religious beliefs. Considering cultural differences as ‘facts’ which need to be ‘preserved’ without modifications and alterations has often led multicultural policies to a dead end that reduces intercultural interactions rather than facilitating them. Nonetheless, it is difficult to deny that living together in the same public space while respecting each other’s specificities continues to be one of the key aspects of a complete democracy in an increasingly globalized world. The need to overcome some limits of the multicultural perspective does not exempt society from the need to continue to promote an effective intercultural dialogue able to expand participation and civil discussion among groups and individuals who, while expressing a diversity of opinions, beliefs, and cultural references, coexist in the same civil and political context. To this end, it seems useful to re-evaluate the presuppositions of the multicultural debate critically and carefully, avoiding

any reduction of the complexity of demands for cultural recognition to defence, without alteration and criticism, of cultural differences (Johansson 2022). A mature and sustainable multiculturalism probably cannot be reduced to new forms of assimilation to, and homologation with, the canons of the majority or the dominant group, nor can it exhaust itself in a tolerance based on indifference. On the contrary, it requires a serious and informed discussion on the ability to think and create a society open to the complexity and differences that characterize an era of growing, and inevitable, interconnection on a global scale.

The multiculturalism backlash

Multiculturalism has often been accused of producing more problems than solutions. Its main fault is allegedly that of having excessively valued minority cultures, to the detriment of the majority one. This has produced ‘parallel societies’ in which groups, encapsulated in their identities and cultures, are encouraged to preserve their differences and to interact as little as possible with other groups. Part of this backlash relates to the fact that a large part of the multicultural debate, at least in the 1990s and at the beginning of the new century, was monopolized by political philosophy and by the effort to develop a coherent theory of justice able to include liberal-democratic principles and the recognition of cultural difference. In this way, the debate often acquired an ideological, abstract character, opposing defenders of liberal principles and supporters of cultural pluralism. Led by normative concerns, the debate ended up by detaching theoretical preoccupations with a coherent and elegant formulation of ideal principles from the empirical analysis of the situations in which cultural difference and its recognition become what is at stake in concrete, daily interactions. In the effort to define the ideal conditions for a respectful co-existence with cultural difference, multiculturalism was conceived as a way to essentialize differences and contribute to their reification, supporting institutional recognition of cultural difference in the public sphere, with special provision of language services and welfare state benefits for members of minority groups. In so doing, normative multicultural debates sustained a

«premature normativism in much contemporary political theory, that is, an all-to-quick reification of given group identities, a failure to interrogate the meaning of cultural identity, and a turning away from the sociological and historical literature on these topics, which are dominated by methodological ‘constructivism’» (Benhabib, 2002: viii).

Although a ‘strong multiculturalism’ (Grillo, 2007) providing special resources for minority group members has rarely been implemented, critics blame it for giving exaggerated support to minority groups and cultures. By doing so,

multicultural policies allegedly weaken the original local culture, eroding its democratic and liberal values, and encourage minority group members not to integrate into the large society and to live parallel lives (Cantle, 2001).

Beyond multiculturalism

Different ways to conceive the possible forms of coexistence with difference have been proposed in order to overcome the pitfalls of multiculturalism. Among these proposals, the ideas of interculturalism, cosmopolitanism, superdiversity and everyday multiculturalism will be considered in this chapter. Before going into the details of these various proposals, however, it is useful to return briefly to the original essential features of multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism does not originate from the simple quantitative growth of cultural differences. Rather, it derives from a critique of the ideals of assimilation that guided the way in which Western societies used to understand progress and national society in classical modernity. The modern idea that cultural differences should be fused in the great ‘melting pot’ of modern metropolitan life actually underpinned the worldview and ideals of the dominant group, particularly the white-male-heterosexual one. The civil rights, youth, feminist, and postcolonial movements – starting from the 1960s – questioned the ‘normality’ and the presumed ‘universalism’ of the dominant thought system, accusing it of parochialism and claiming recognition and respect for different experiences and worldviews. Multiculturalism presents itself as a way to promote the inclusion and participation of previously excluded or marginalized groups, recognizing and valuing their particularities (Taylor, 1994; Honneth, 1996). It depicts itself as a fight against stereotypes and prejudices that portray marginalized groups in negative terms by trapping their members in belittled and despised identities (Hall, 2000; Gilroy, 2006). Finally, multiculturalism poses the question of revising the ‘rules of the game’ of social coexistence. It accuses the current social institutions, the dominant thought system, and the structure of social relations of being based on rules and values, often implicit and not immediately evident, which systematically advantage and reward members of the dominant group, providing them with a solid basis for maintaining their privileged positions (McLaren, 1997; May, 1999). The multicultural perspective criticizes the assumption that the constitutive principle of the State and of public life can be cultural homogeneity organized around ‘universal’ values declined in terms of individualistic liberalism; conversely, it values an ‘equality in difference’ whereby social cohesion is guaranteed, not by sharing a single model but by acknowledging the irreducible specificity of different people and the cultural traditions to which they feel they belong.

Multiculturalism makes demands for participation, recognition, and respect (Colombo, 2015); demands that entail deconstruction of the positions of power

of the majority group and revision of the rules of social life. Furthermore, they imply a critique of a universalism that makes the perspective of the dominant group ‘natural’ and ‘normal’; a determined fight against discriminatory categorisations, racism, and sexism; a different idea of citizenship and belonging that is able to accept and value cultural differences.

It is useful to evaluate the various alternative options to multiculturalism in light of these demands in order to assess whether they are able, in addition to overcoming the difficulties and contradictions of the multicultural proposition, to give satisfactory answers to these questions.

Interculturalism

The idea of interculturalism has been discussed as a possible alternative to – or specification of – multiculturalism. Interculturalism has been advocated as encouraging communication, recognising dynamic identities, and promoting unity. It stresses interpersonal relationships as the places where rational agreement can be reached, where rational and well-informed people can transform difference from an obstacle to a resource for communication (Barrett, 2013).

In direct and stark contrast to multiculturalism, interculturalism stresses the importance of, and the desire for, mutual empathy in interacting across cultural differences. It focuses on commonalities among people with different cultural identifications, instead of differences, as multiculturalism does (Zapata-Barrero, 2019: 347). It aims to encourage both inter-community and inter-personal relations (Cantle, 2012). The goal is to overcome the criticisms that accuse multiculturalism of giving excessive attention to differences, so that it preserves them by favouring their isolation. Rather than intervening to promote maintenance of the specific characteristics of different groups, public policies should support encounters and exchanges among those groups, creating opportunities for them to meet, and encouraging dialogue and discussion (Zapata-Barrero, 2016).

Interculturalism emphasises communication and aims to facilitate exchange and reciprocal understanding among people of different backgrounds; it requires comparison, negotiation, and the active resolution of differences (Wood *et al.*, 2006: 9); it recognises dynamic identities and challenges illiberality. Rather than stressing what is specific, interculturalism highlights what is shared and the historical connectedness of cultures on a global scale (Rattansi, 2011: 153).

Critics of interculturalism observe that it is not really a social theory because it is not able to recognise the influence of the context, the formal and informal distribution of power that structures interpersonal relationships. Although it aims to highlight that cultures are constantly changing, stressing the importance and unavoidability of exchange and modifications, it tends to accentuate rather than undermine existing political and social hierarchies (Aman, 2015; Gorski, 2008).

It does not adopt a sufficiently strong theoretical perspective on power (Loh, 2021). While multiculturalism is a critical perspective on social reality that stresses the effect of ignoring, erasing or depicting minority cultures in negative terms, interculturalism often limits itself to a generic and voluntarist empathy with minorities.

The emphasis on dialogue risks concealing the fact that dialogue is inevitably marked by different competencies, power inequalities, and status disparities between the participants. Moreover, the powerful determine the rules by which dialogue may occur (Stokke & Lybæk, 2018). By removing power from the interaction, interculturalism comes to conceive living with difference as a simple matter of goodwill. By accentuating the importance of accord, mutual comprehension, and empathy, it shifts attention to the asymmetries and dynamics of power. Furthermore, the fact that interculturalism does «not recognise cultural boundaries as fixed but in a state of flux and remaking» (Cantle, 2012: 156) means that it does not recognize how important belonging can be for members of discriminated minorities, who, in the solidarity of the group can find a place of resistance against discrimination, and in collective identification the strength to be recognized as political actors and act in the public sphere.

In this manner, interculturalism ends up supporting the dominant culture, presenting it as just one of the differences present in society, and lacking the capacity to scrutinise its dominant position (Sealy, 2018). Interculturalism risks giving up the efforts of multiculturalism to unveil racism and to counter the invisible and taken-for-granted assumptions that define the allocation of power, rights, and privileges; it thus shirks the task of readjusting unequal relations of power and exploitation between the dominant and the dominated (Hall, 2000).

Interculturalism also fails to escape the trap of the reification of difference. Although it criticises multiculturalism to transform cultural difference into an essence, it rests on a view of cultures as separate and well-defined groups of people that, however, can be connected in a positive way through appropriate forms of dialogue.

Finally, Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood warn against the danger of dismissing multiculturalism too hastily. Interculturalism risks giving excessive importance to the individual, negating the importance of the group. Multiculturalism is still a useful concept because it «presently surpasses interculturalism as a political orientation that is able to recognise that social life consists of individuals and groups and that both need to be provided for in the formal and informal distribution of powers» (Meer & Modood, 2012: 192).

Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism includes both an interest in the universal and an interest in the particular. In its most widely accepted usage, cosmopolitanism implies a

worldliness, or a readiness to accept different cultural influences. It is based on the idea that groups do not matter because there is only one group: humanity. In this perspective, cultural differences should be conceived as plurality, variability, and opportunity: the raw materials that allow people to choose, construct their own lives and be free. It stresses the ethical dimensions: the cosmopolitan looks outward to see differences as an opportunity for connection rather than as a pretext for separation. The cosmopolitan is a particular type of person; s/he is the ironist, an individual who is 'cold' rather than 'hot' in terms of loyalties, and who finds ambiguity and uncertainty challenging and interesting (Kendal et al., 2009: 7). The ideal cosmopolitan person strongly believes in a common future based on shared goals, mutual respect, and responsibility towards members as well as outsiders. S/he is a citizen of the world, a person who is strongly aware of his/her responsibility towards all other human beings, and not only towards his/her siblings, friends, neighbours, or compatriots. On the other hand, s/he has a strong interest in the particular and has a positive attitude toward cultural diversity, recognising that s/he can learn a lot from the experience of others and that cultural difference is a value that is worth respecting and protecting.

The ethical position of cosmopolitanism is rooted in the idea that all human beings share a set of values, such as hospitality and courtesy, solidarity and generosity, respect for other human beings and the desire for a peaceful settlement of social conflicts, which make mutual understanding possible, regardless of the specifics of individual and collective histories. Greater social justice can be achieved by promoting and guaranteeing universal human rights, not by protecting specific rights for different cultural groups.

Cosmopolitanism minimises the importance of cultural difference. It argues that the personal relationship with humanity at large is more important than relationships with others from the same community, ethnos, or nation. Even when cultural difference is recognised (Appiah, 2006), it is just the starting point for a cross-cultural conversation, a generator of curiosity, and a motive to explore other experiences and learn from others. When cosmopolitan attitudes prevail, living together in a multicultural neighbourhood is an opportunity to engage in conversations across borders, cultures and religions, a way to learn from others how we can better understand and live our own experiences.

Cosmopolitanism is proposed as an alternative form of coexistence with cultural difference. It accuses multiculturalism of emphasizing the importance of belonging to a particular group. In the perspective of multiculturalism – cosmopolitanism argues – people become mere representatives of the presumed distinctive characteristics of the group to which they are ascribed, so that individual differences are diminished or erased, and the subjective possibilities of self-expression are limited. Instead, cosmopolitanism adopts an idea of a fluid, mobile and multiple identity that depends on contexts and situations, rather than being a constitutive dimension of a person.

Although the most accurate theorisations of cosmopolitanism observe that it is not purely an individualistic state of mind, because it can only emerge under certain material and institutional conditions, nevertheless they often tend to see a cosmopolitan attitude as an individualistic positive stance towards mixing and the creation of hybrids. Hybridism is often conceived as always positive: a desirable condition for emancipation from previous constraints and powers, a state for greater awareness, and a broader guarantee of freedom and justice. The idea of cosmopolitanism retains a strong normative character; it portrays the cosmopolitan as a hero of the new global elite, the new 'universal' human being who will eventually reach the highest level of civilization. It contributes to transforming the features of specific privileged groups – the well-off – as a universal model for all humanity; features that should be acquired by all individuals who want to be considered part of the (best and truest) humanity.

Rather than the recognition and protection of current cultural diversities, the cosmopolitan perspective emphasizes the importance of promoting and strengthening human rights (Dupont et al., 2023). It sees the overcoming of local and national powers – replaced by supra-national human rights institutions – as the best way to enhance individual and collective freedom, inclusion, and participation in the public sphere. In this way, the cosmopolitan perspective often ends up forgetting or concealing that a conception of oneself as detached from any local affiliation, living and feeling at home everywhere, being 'without borders', a citizen of the world, and being open-minded requires specific resources – material, relational and cognitive. Such resources are more accessible to members of the dominant group. Being at home anywhere means having a passport that allows you to cross any border, having the money necessary to access consumer goods and the lifestyle needed to be recognized as an adequate and deserving person, being able to acquire the capabilities and skills needed to interact in different contexts where different languages, rules and expectations prevail. Elevating this figure of the cosmopolitan to a desired universal model of open-mindedness and progress means accusing those who are tied to local constraints, who are deprived of economic and educational resources, of being 'retrograde', incapable or, worse, guilty of not wanting to live a responsible ethical life.

In this way, disparities of power are concealed, negated, and legitimated. The emphasis on hybridism and mixing only works to the advantage of secure and protected new elites in a privileged position to present themselves as open-minded, detached from local restraints, and citizens of the world. By stating that belonging is not important, cosmopolitanism risks becoming a new form of individualism. When formulated in individualistic and liberal terms, cosmopolitanism does not recognise the importance of social solidarity and the fact that belonging is an important resource, especially for excluded and discriminated groups. It fails to recognise the importance, for minority groups,

of forms of ‘strategic essentialism’ (Spivak, 1988). It fails to recognise that minorities often need to ‘essentialize’, at least temporarily, their collective identity in order to become political subjects, defend particular interests, and achieve certain goals.

Superdiversity

‘Superdiversity’ is a term intended to underline a level and kind of complexity that surpasses anything previously experienced in Western societies (Vertovec, 2023). It signals the necessity to go beyond ethnic differences, to focus on the proliferation and mutually conditioning effects of a number of significant variables that affect where, how, and with whom people live (Vertovec, 2007: 1025).

The idea of superdiversity rests on the growing awareness that current globalisation processes are changing the composition of societies, multiplying the forms and importance of factors that create meaningful diversification within societies. Ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, religion, language, civil status, education, professional training, age, physical conditions, rights and entitlements all take part in shaping individual opportunities for inclusion or exclusion. By stressing the multiplicity of factors that produce differentiation, superdiversity challenges multicultural ‘groupism’ and the contraposition between majority and minority culture.

Multiculturalism is criticised because it «tends to be based on, or at least replicate, a rather flat, homogenizing or unidimensional view of difference: that is, that every person belongs to one or another group that can be represented by the presence of a single individual in an organization or activity» (Vertovec, 2023: 5). In doing so, it promotes rather static, rigid, essentialist and limited ideas of ethnic groups and cultures. Furthermore, multiculturalism is accused of focusing excessively on racial and ethnic differences, at the expense of other dimensions of individual difference that play an essential role in social categorization and the distribution of social burdens and privileges.

The idea of super-diversity is useful for grasping how and to what extent cultural difference has become significant in globalised contexts. It highlights the multiplicity of intersections that contribute to defining the – always provisional and contextual – subjective and collective social locations. It makes sense of a reality in which a multiplicity of factors participate in shaping people’s lives, and it makes evident how the capacity to manage diversity has become a skill important for personal fulfilment, social recognition, inclusion, and exclusion.

While super-diversity, at least in the intentions of some of its users, is not about more diversity, but instead about understanding processes and patterns of diversification (Meissner 2015: 560), it remains ‘a summary term’ (Vertovec, 2007: 1026; Meissner & Vertovec, 2015). It describes the current importance given to diversity but fails to suggest why, and why now, diversity has become

a resource needed to interpret and understand social reality. It risks giving rise to a new reification of cultural diversity, which is taken for granted rather than critically scrutinised in its production. People are seen as simple bearers of difference, rather than as active protagonists of its production; and the practices of power involved in creating and/or selecting specific sets of differences among others remain unquestioned. Migrants, in particular, are seen as 'having' a complex set of differences that prevent their recognition as collective political counterparts. At the same time, the 'autochthonous' can perceive themselves as characterised by an alleged unified identity that should be preserved and strengthened through adequate forms of solidarity and openness towards others' diversity.

Although super-diversity signals the emergence of a post-multicultural perspective that seeks to harmonise both a strong common identity and values coupled with the recognition of cultural differences (Vertovec, 2010), it risks supporting a new normative idea of integration in which the multiplication of diversity is only a way to conceal the processes by which differences are produced. These processes are still firmly driven by the dominant groups and are at the basis of the social distinctions that mark inclusion and exclusion. The result is that superdiversity minimises the significance of racism in understanding contemporary multiculturalism. As Les Back (2015) observes,

«superdiversity is a vacuous superlative [...]. This emphasis on superlative difference feeds the fire of public anxieties of an already panicked debate about immigration. While there is an urgent need to find new ways of notating and representing the cultural kaleidoscope of the migrant city, to do so without paying equal attention to the ways division lines are drawn within urban multiculturalism is profoundly ill-judged. As a consequence, super-diversity as a concept is politically one-dimensional and ultimately culpable in letting the sentiments of anti-immigrant time go unchallenged».

Super-diversity allows a step to be taken forward from the multicultural perspective that emphasises the existence of well-defined and sufficiently stable different groups in the same society which compete with each other for material resources and symbolic recognition. However, it fails to draw attention to the processes through which individuals manage the wide range of cultural differences at their disposal, building forms of identification and recognition that adapt to the situations, goals, and issues at stake.

Everyday multiculturalism

The idea of 'everyday multiculturalism' arises not as an alternative to multiculturalism but as its specification (Semi et al., 2009). It directs attention to how cultural difference is used in everyday contexts (Wise & Velayutham, 2009).

Less emphasis is given to the normative dimension and more to the ways in which cultural difference is used as a political tool to create distinctions, privileges, and exclusions. The idea of everyday multiculturalism also endeavours to go beyond a too strong, normative, and culture-centric idea of multiculturalism, but it tries to overcome the too individualistic idea of interculturalism, the too radical processualism of cosmopolitanism, as well as the risk raised by super-diversity of a new kind of reification of cultures and differences.

Cultural difference is conceived not as static and homogeneous, as something that must be safeguarded, but as what is at stake in the definition of social reality (Colombo, 2010). Unlike interculturalism, the perspective of everyday multiculturalism does not posit itself as a normative replacement for multiculturalism; it adopts an empirical approach focused on the micro, but it pays attention to how the micro dimension interacts with the social structure and power dynamics (Butcher & Harris, 2010). Compared with interculturalism, everyday multiculturalism suggests the importance of maintaining a critical posture towards the power asymmetries that define the condition in which dialogue can concretely occur. Everyday multiculturalism suggests focusing on concrete situations of interactions where difference becomes, at least for some of the actors involved, an important element in constructing social reality and in the meaning attributed to it (Watson & Saha, 2013). Rather than expressing an ethical interest in dialogue with difference, it stresses the importance that difference assumes as a political resource for the definition of the situation.

Unlike cosmopolitanism, the idea of everyday multiculturalism suggests that the sense of belonging is important, and that culture constitutes a reference necessary to give meaning to experience. This does not imply that culture should be seen as static and capable of determining individual choices and actions. On the contrary, cultural differences and identities are seen as the result of interaction, as something that people define relationally in order to understand, interpret and make sense of social reality. The construction of differences, their concealment or their transformation depend on contexts and power relationships; they constitute the tools that allow people to draw distinctions, to create and legitimize inclusion and exclusion, solidarity, and privileges. While cosmopolitanism stresses the capacity to use difference in a positive way, everyday multiculturalism stresses the capacity to use difference in accordance with the situation. Moreover, while the former highlights the fading of strong forms of belonging, the concept of everyday multiculturalism stresses the possibility – and sometimes the necessity – of belonging, simultaneously, to more than one locality, using difference and equality as meaningful elements which need to be emphasised or concealed in relation to different discourses, audiences, situations, the contextual restraints to be faced, or the personal goals to be achieved. From this point of view, difference constitutes an opportunity for adapting to the context, obtaining some advantages, claiming recognition and participation,

and resisting racism and discrimination: it paves the way for political claims rather than being an expression of personal ethical attitudes. While recognising the necessity to focus on the never-ending processes of production of differences and identities, everyday multiculturalism, unlike cosmopolitanism, recognises that differences and identifications are not all equivalent, symmetric, and exchangeable. It highlights the relations of power that determine not only which kind of differences will become meaningful and will be used, but also the degree of freedom people have in defining and using cultural differences.

It is this attention to the dynamics of construction, use and contestation of differences that differentiates the perspective of everyday multiculturalism from that of superdiversity. The latter considers differences as external factors which, in their composite intersection, weigh on people, defining their possibilities. Instead, everyday multiculturalism questions the origin of differences and the ways in which the various intersections assume prominence and meaning, in a dynamic context characterized by asymmetries of power. Everyday multiculturalism interrogates the historical and contextual factors that produce difference as relevant, rather than accepting, as a matter of fact, that societies are becoming increasingly diverse. It is mainly interested in focusing on how difference is presented, produced, resisted, and contested in empirical contexts, how social actors use it in everyday relationships to make sense of both their actions and their experiences, and to produce spaces for inclusion and exclusion.

The concept of everyday multiculturalism aims to go beyond the idea that 'existing' difference should be recognised and accepted in order to produce a more equal and democratic society. It suggests the importance of analysing the concrete situation in which people, in different social locations and with different amounts of power, use difference as a means to define the situation, creating inclusion and exclusion, recognition and domination. It considers cultural difference as an effective political tool that people can use – and actually use – to produce 'social facts', to give form and meaning to social reality, producing and reproducing specific forms of power.

Everyday multiculturalism suggests the importance of focusing not only on the subjective capacity to create new meanings and practices and to resist hegemonic powers but also on the social conditions and the individual capacities that allow some specific constructs to become 'social facts', while others remain merely individual and local transient attempts. It focuses on the importance of contexts, the social location and the hierarchies of power, the capacity to produce and manage new codes, meanings, categories, and the social conditions that hinder or support such capacities. It does not consider it sufficient to recognise that cultural difference is socially constructed and, thus, denounce its partiality and deconstruct its basis. Instead, it suggests focussing on *how* cultural difference is constructed, on the *processes* and *conditions of possibility* that transform some differences – and not others – into social reality. From an epistemological

point of view, it is interested in turning what usually serves as an explanation into something that should be explained.

Everyday multiculturalism is accused of underestimating the importance of structural dimensions and institutional policies. Analysing the tactics of using and negotiating cultural differences in daily practices may not be sufficient to understand and contrast the dynamics of racism and discrimination. While it is not in dispute that people develop specific tactics and strategies for using cultural difference in specific contexts, this does not account for institutional forms of differentiation and discrimination. However, the analysis of situated practices – to be politically effective – must be clearly placed within a more general socio-historical context (Sealy, 2018). Another critical point is that everyday multiculturalism has often focused on the analysis of convivial situations, favouring the observation of positive interactions, and emphasizing the ability to adapt and mediate between differences. However, this does not exclude that the same theoretical and analytical tools can be used to study racism and conflict (Wise & Noble, 2016; Back & Sinha, 2016). The dynamics and practices of everyday multiculturalism should not necessarily be reduced to simple and happy forms of mediation and mutual accommodation; they are also the sites where asymmetries of power and hierarchies of domination are produced and reproduced. The analysis of everyday multiculturalism practices should not necessarily be reduced to moments of dialogue and exchange; it should be extended to interactions and places where asymmetry, exclusion, and racism are produced.

Conclusion

Despite the growing and widespread hostility towards multicultural politics – often originating from preconceived political-ideological positions and fuelled by a growing use of populist rhetoric of fear and threat – how to foster effective coexistence with respect for mutual difference, a coexistence that takes into account the complexity of the demands made by multiculturalism, remains one of the central challenges of contemporary societies. The endeavour to re-elaborate multicultural requests without ending up in the dead end of strong multiculturalism is evident in the recent proliferation of terms intended to indicate a step forward in reflection on how to live with difference in the same public space, overcoming the limits and aporias of some multicultural interpretations. It is an important step, but one that cannot completely ignore the claims that generated the ideas and practices of multiculturalism. Demands for participation, recognition, respect, and revision of the rules of social life constitute the core of multicultural claims, and they also constitute an important compass with which to define broader solid conditions of social justice. The perspectives of interculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and superdiversity furnish

useful criticisms with which to avoid reifying and essentializing differences and cultures, but they tend to provide unsatisfactory and partial answers, underestimating or ignoring the criticisms of existing power and domination relations advanced by multiculturalism. The perspective of everyday multiculturalism underlines the importance of an analysis which overcomes a merely normative concern to focus on the worldly practices and experiences of coexistence with difference in a context characterized by growing cultural plurality. Assuming a constructionist perspective, it makes it possible to avoid forms of reductionism and reification of differences and cultures, without necessarily falling into irenic interpretations that resolve tensions in full and blind trust in dialogue and empathy. However, the analysis of daily practices should necessarily be placed in broader institutional contexts and take into account the structural dimensions that define the array of possibilities that people and groups have in their interactions. The critique of structural dimensions is an inescapable part of multicultural claims. For this reason, reflection on power remains at the core of the multicultural perspective. It does not seem useful to overcome the critical points of multiculturalism by neglecting the focus it places on the dynamics of power that generate, sustain, and limit differences.

Some dimensions seem important to define a multiculturalism that overcomes the critical points of multiculturalism. It is useful to keep an eye on contrasting stereotypes and prejudices. It is important to remember with Charles Taylor (1994: 25) that «nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being». Hence it is crucial to highlight the ways – often ‘trivial’, taken-for-granted, ‘commonsensical’ – in which the dominant groups build and strengthen their position of privilege by representing minorities in a negative way. It is also important to bear in mind the demand for participation in social life which underpins multicultural claims. This makes it necessary to rethink the terms of citizenship, national identification, and social cohesion. Solidarity and a social bond based on uniformity and homologation seem unsuitable for encouraging the participation of individuals and groups increasingly characterized by different value references and plural experiential paths. Conceiving a solidarist and cohesive society, recognizing the privileged positions of dominant groups, promoting the inclusion of marginal groups, recognizing their dignity, and giving their experiences due respect: these are essential for the development of a more just society. They represent the core of multicultural claims and the main goals that multiculturalism has clearly established, even if it has perhaps failed to provide clear indications on how to achieve them. The task of finding answers to these questions continues to be important. For this reason, it does not seem useful to abandon multiculturalism completely, but to continue trying to respond adequately to the fundamental demands it poses.

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PART II – PRACTICAL MULTICULTURAL ISSUES

Chapter 6

Migration and religious diversity in Italy. Exploring an evolving and contentious process

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Abstract

The surprising and rapid growth of religious pluralism can be considered one of the main transformations driven by migratory processes in Italy. Elaborating on original results collected for different research projects, we discuss the ways in which migrants have re-settled and re-adjusted their faiths in a new political and social context as well as we explain how State institutions and local territories have reacted to this historical change. The analytical themes will be, on the one side, (a) the modes of re-sacralisation of Italian geography and (b) the lived experience of migrants in their religious places. On the other side, we examine (c) the current and main ways of regulating religious diversity, including the institutional barriers that these express, and the (d) counterstrategies that migrants adopt to continue to practise their faith despite fears and forms of opposition. To grasp the intersection of these dynamics, we consider what we also call the «Italian paradox»: a diffused presence of religious minorities in cities or post-industrial areas which, however, frequently lacks adequate juridical and civic recognition. The analysis of this misalignment, between «*de iure* and *de facto* religious pluralism», will be the final argument this essay proposes.

Italy and its changing religious soul: between transition and tension

The Italian religious scenario has rapidly changed as a direct result of migratory flows (Pace, 2013; Ricucci, 2017; Zanfrini, 2020; Ambrosini, Molli &

Naso, 2022). Especially in the last three decades, the settlement of international migrants has produced a new and increasingly complex religious geography, leading to one of the main social and cultural novelties for a country with a strong mono-religious background.

In Italy, pluralism is not a completely new phenomenon but, in terms of composition, it was historically limited to the presence of Evangelical churches, especially Methodist and Waldensian churches, various Jewish communities and some Pentecostal movements. In this sense, data from ISTAT (Office of National Statistics) are quite eloquent: almost the entire Italian population (99.6%) was constituted by Catholics in 1931 (Naso, 2022).

Looking at the present, the coming of new migrant minorities and their religious traditions has profoundly changed this (quasi) mono-religious configuration. At the end of 2023, we may trace the presence of a population of just over 5,300,000 officially resident foreigners. According to statistics provided by Idos-Confronti (2024), we discover that half of them (2.480.000 – 50 %) are Christians³ and a third are Muslims⁴ (1.760.000 - 34%). Among Christians, more than half are (a) Orthodox (55 % - equal to 1.400.000 people) who precede (b) Catholics (800.000, a third of all Christians) and (c) Evangelicals belonging to different congregational areas (200.000, about a tenth of Christians). To complete this picture, there are also Eastern religions, for example: Hindus (170.000), Buddhists (140.000) and Sikhs (about 90.000). In light of these data, we may grasp why migrations represent the major factor of change for «the religious soul» of Italian society.

This transition, like any other form of social and cultural change, is not an easy process to accept and recognise. Various fears are spreading, gaining success in the public opinion, such as the apprehension that new minorities may threaten social cohesion, or the idea of incompatibility of their religious traditions with the public sphere. We can also mention the more recent «claim» for the defence of the Christian identity of the Italian society, presented as the true, and unique, cultural basis with which our country should identify itself. Reaffirming its value, especially (but not only) against Muslim communities, has become a recurrent anathema used by right-wing populist movements in Italy and elsewhere in Europe (Ambrosini & Molli, 2023).

3 These data on religious belongings show also that we are not facing an Islamization of the country given that the majority of migrants are estimated to be Christians. In this sense, we can observe that religious diversity, in reality, is not an issue of «a less Christian Italy, but of a Christianity that is ever less Italian».

4 According to ISMU (2024), Moroccans are the main national group among Muslims in Italy (27.4% of the total). Then, we find the Albanians (10.3%), Bangladeshis (8.9%), Pakistanis (8.5%), Senegalese (7.2%), Egyptians (6.7%) and Tunisians (6.6%). In terms of religious gatherings, local communities can be monoethnic or mixed; it depends on how their local leaderships have decided to structure and shape the same realities, a theme we elaborate on the next sessions.

Another key and, at the same time, controversial issue concerns instead the legal and political governance of pluralism. Even if the religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed, the current law that regulates the relations between the Italian State and religious minorities presents critical barriers, especially for their formal recognition (see, for details, Ferrari 2012). Its «juridical architrave» is represented by the *intesa*, namely an official agreement stipulated with the State which, however, has a strong discretionary power in deciding whether to accept or reject the proposal to negotiate it. Beyond the (im)possibility of stipulating an *intesa*, the other legal source that could offer a form of recognition to new religious minorities shows similar limits. Over the last eighty years, few changes have been made to this law dated 1929 (and introduced during the fascist period), whose name is quite emblematic: «admitted faiths». Thus, the current legislative body conditions the chance to be formally recognised by public institutions, especially when eventual «applicants» are migrants, whose political citizenship is a weak point to recall.

Starting from these premises, the chapter focuses on the role of migrant populations for the expansion of religious diversity in Italy, and it examines what will be also called the «Italian Paradox»: a diffused pluralism in Italian cities and their urban scenarios which, however, frequently lacks adequate recognition. The analysis of this gap between «*de iure* and *de facto* religious pluralism» relies on data gathered in various studies on this subject, including a large research project⁵ conducted in Lombardy – the main Italian region for what concerns the presence of migrants and their faiths – and sustained by the Waldensian church.

For framing the Italian case, the chapter discusses four main arguments. The first inquiries into (a) the practices of re-sacralisations of spaces, presenting the ways in which migrants tried to intercalate their faiths in Italian urban and extra-urban landscapes; the second intends to shed light on (b) the lived experience of migrants in their religious places, identifying meanings and functions that religion re-acquires in migration; the third examines the Italian institutional context and (c) the main ways of recognition of religious diversity, including the problems and conflicts that minority religions can encounter at local level. Finally, we explore the (d) counterstrategies and tactics that minorities use to continue to experience their faith despite stigmatisation and lack of an adequate recognition. As we will see, the main analytical guidelines will be «transition and tension».

5 The author wishes to thank the «Confronti Study Centre» and its associated journal «Confronti. Religions, Politics and Society» (<https://confronti.net/centro-studi>) for having promoted the research project on «religious pluralism and immigration» in Italy, and for all the supports and suggestions received during the development of the study by colleagues.

Migrant minorities' practices of re-sacralisation: modes of change of the Italian religious geography

The sociological study of space becomes particularly useful for exploring the ways of transformation of Italy from «a mono to a pluri-religious country» (Ambrosini, Molli & Naso 2022). In search of a site where to gather and worship, migrant populations tried to re-create their faiths in existing geography. In this sense, they transformed the meaning and use of urban and extra-urban scenarios in religious terms, generally by re-adapting neglected and abandoned buildings, such as old churches and sanctuaries as well as disused warehouses, factories or shops.

This religious activism led by ethnic minorities represent an interesting (and often overlooked) «counter-history» of migration. In the last three decades, the strong economic demand of new workforce in various sectors of the labour market has incentivized the arrival of new populations. Consequently, Italy has received the religious diversity they bring with them. Pace and Da Silva Moreira, commenting on the famous sentence of Max Frisch: «we asked for workers, we got people instead», have also added: «we discovered they have a soul» (2018: 3). As we will see, this also led to a sort of schizophrenic attitude: we wanted workers, but not their prayers.

The impact of migrants' religions on urban landscapes is the focus of a growing and interdisciplinary literature (Cancellieri & Saint-Blancat 2012). Along with the pioneering works of R. Orsi (1999; 2002) and L. Kong (2001; 2010), scholars like J. Eade (2012) and D. Garbin (2023) started to explore how minorities re-shaped the religious contours of contemporary cities. As commented by J. Eade, «while mobilities have been extensively analysed in terms of secular processes, the role of religion is becoming ever more evident» (2012:1). Similarly, Burchardt and Becci invited to «interrogate and partially reject earlier generalized assumptions about the secularizing effects of urbanization» (2013:1).

Here the point is that the coming of migrant minorities revitalised the presence of religions in the city, leading to the formation of «micro-laboratories of pluralism» where boundaries between «sacred and secular» have become ever more porous and fluid because of processes of reconversion and readaptation of the existing urban fabric (Garbin & Strhan 2017). Another correlated point concerns the fact that religion is a key dimension for the intertwining of «locality with transnationality» (Sheringham 2013; Vásquez and Knott 2014) and for the juncture of two different geographies of sense in the same place. The research of Levitt (2007): «God needs no passport», gives interesting interpretations of these processes, as religion, par excellence, represents one of the major forces that transcends the physicality of national borders.

Taking inspiration from this literature, it is possible to examine the Italian case and the religious revivals promoted by immigrants. These are discussed by using findings gathered in a comparative research project. Thanks to detailed work of mapping, we can compare the settlement of 71 Orthodox parishes, 41 Pentecostal churches (among 410 identified), 85 Catholic communities, 128 Muslim centres, 17 Sikh temples and 6 Buddhist centres, for a total of 348 new religious communities in Lombardy, which is the main Italian region in terms of number of migrants (a quarter of them reside in this region). Precisely, it is possible to discuss what I term «practices of re-sacralisation», namely the ways in which migrants try to obtain and readjust a place of worship according to their spiritual needs. The empirical analysis shows three recurrent spatial patterns that occur in: 1) city central areas, 2) urban neighbourhoods and 3) extra-urban industrial or agricultural areas.

In the first case, we found the process of «re-sacralising already sacred spaces», namely the reuse and revitalisation of abandoned or less used churches. Both Catholic (Molli 2020) and Orthodox migrant communities (Guglielmi 2022) are key examples. Specifically, Italian parishes typically possess a wide assortment of places of worship in urban central areas, which, due to secularization trends and the decreasing in birth rate, today are less attended, and, in some cases, left empty. Christian migrants, after not easy processes of negotiation with local parishes, have reopened «vacant churches», where they can converge from city suburbs on weekends (Molli 2020). Milan – with the presence of 22 Orthodox parishes and 40 catholic ethnic communities – has become the main «epicentre» for the development of a new Christian geography. Its religious centre represents the hub for an important urban mobility that attracts faithful who come from a vast surrounding area and who organise long spiritual journeys to participate in Sunday meetings. Forgotten corners of historic centres were therefore revived by Christian immigrants.

Another version of this spatial pattern is the «church sharing» (Ambrosini 2019), that is the use of the same place between different migrants' communities or between migrants and Italians who frequent the same local parish; here we find an intercultural but not easy spatial interchange between ethnically and socially different groups of faithful.

In the second case, we have the process of «sacralising suburbs». This is the reuse and readaptation of empty shops or commercial structures (like offices) as well as apartments in popular areas. Pentecostal communities in peripheries are an emblematic example. We mention the experience of Latin-Americans who work in city suburbs – like the case of family caregivers, nurses in hospitals as well as workers in the logistic sector – and their efforts to collect money and look for places where to re-create churches. With respect to the religious revitalization of disused buildings in urban areas, we can observe that a facilitating factor was the economic crisis initiated in 2008. Our study can confirm that it

was a watershed moment also in sacred terms. More precisely, it posed (unexpected) premises for the availability of spaces, since Italians were less interested in new investments and property trading, leading to new opportunities for migrant minorities in search of a place (e.g., auctioned properties). Recurring in various interviews was the reference to the period after 2008; as emblematically commented by a Pentecostal pastor: «the crisis helped us».

Another case of interest for the same pattern in suburban areas is that of ethnic Buddhist temples (Molli 2022a). These were established by Sri Lankans who decided to dispose of their own place of worship separately from other Buddhist centres founded by Italians in the 80s and 90s. They gathered resources for acquiring apartments or buildings where to re-create their worship halls.

In the third case, we have the «sacralization of extra-urban spaces», generally in industrial areas, as in the case of Muslim communities (127) who often (but not always) reconverted old and disused warehouses or factories (see also El Ayoubi & Paravati 2018; Mezzetti 2022). This is a process that develops «from inside» through practices of redecoration, while «from outside» buildings often maintain the profile of an industrial unit. As we will see in the next paragraphs, since in Italy the possibility of creating a religious space *ex-novo* is subject to a complicated legal procedure (especially in Lombardy), they were forced to find this kind of solution by reusing factories or warehouses, not without tensions and political conflicts.

Another important example is that of Sikh temples which are concentrated in extra-urban agriculture zones, often in medium-small municipalities. This type of geolocation is associated to the fact that Indian immigrants are frequently employed as milkers in Lombardy (Gallo 2021; Bertolani 2013; Naso 2021). Over time, they have replaced the Italian workforce in this specific segment of the labour market, creating an «ethnic occupational niche» (Molli 2024), like in the emblematic case of the «Bassa Bergamasca», a large livestock area that confines with the city of Bergamo, Brescia and Mantua. Here, temples are not buildings created *ab origine* for religious practices but are instead «secular structures», such as deposits or warehouses no longer used. In this sense, Sikhs have re-adjusted abandoned or vacant structures situated in agricultural districts for new spiritual purposes.

Thus, these three different spatial patterns show the efforts of minorities to find a sacred place in Italy and, at the same time, their active role in re-shaping Italian territories, giving them a new sense and use. The ways in which these spaces are re-signified, especially in terms of hubs where to find spiritual and social answers for the experience of migration, are the following analytical points; as we will see, religions in diaspora «recover and rediscover» important functions.

The meanings of religion in migration: roots and routes

«When the fog begins to thicken on the horizons of our lives, and the flash of lightning and boom of thunder announce the outbreak of the hurricane of our suffering, of grief, of sorrow, and of anguish, we turn our eyes and our thoughts to this sanctuary, and we find here safety, relief and peace».

The passage is taken by R. Orsi's book (2010: 165) and, in origin, comes from an Italian periodical: the *Bollettino*, September 1929. It commemorates the history of the «Madonna of 115th Street» and her devotion in New York City. Behind this cult, we find the experience of Italian emigrants, who arrived in Manhattan in the 1870s to work on the First Avenue's trolley tracks.

In a short time, they formed a large working-class enclave along the East River, an area which took the emblematic name of «Italian Harlem». The Marian devotion they transplanted in the city served as a «tool» for reimagining their mother-country, representing in this sense a temporal and transnational bridge: «for Italians the Madonna stood between the United States and Italy, severed memories and emergent aspirations» (Orsi 2010: 163). Beyond the idea, the chaplaincy re-created in honour of «Our Lady», over time, was transformed by emigrants into a meeting point, becoming a source of practical help for the challenges that they met during the process of adaptation and inclusion to the American society: it was a secure port in the «tempest».

After decades, religious institutions perform a similar role in the experience of migration (Ambrosini, Bonizzoni & Molli 2021). As we have seen for the case of Italian emigrants, one of the first functions is the reproduction, maintaining and transmission of cultural traditions (Tweed 1997; Levitt 2007). In sociological terms, religion is a «chain of memory» that serves to re-produce a set of meanings and practices that link «past, present and future». In other words, through this chain, migrants can reactivate and experience «a home away from home». For example, national or civil holidays are frequently celebrated in combination with religious appointments. This form of reincorporation also includes the use of musical instruments, songs, choirs, clothes and native foods which together create the impression of continuity with the mother country.

Along with ethnic traditions, religious gatherings offer a protected space to rely on for combating loneliness and disorientation that derive from the loss of social ties. A familiar atmosphere gives, in this sense, the possibility to find existential security and inner force (Reyes-Espiritu 2023). At the same time, participation in places of worship contributes to the chance to develop relations and strengthen social capital during emigration (Foley & Hoge 2007; Stepick, Rey & Mahler 2009), with significant repercussions in emotional and psychological terms (Connor 2012). This is the motive why, beyond spiritual practices, socializing activities and community events are regularly incentivized in religious spaces. These serve to share the difficulties faithful face in everyday life,

providing them the opportunity to soften sufferings and rebuild a positive image of themselves (Gozdiack, 2002; McMichael 2002). Thus, places of worship are re-transformed into «safe shelters», and religion into a source of «resilience».

In addition to these functions, we also find the response to material and practical needs that migrants meet during the settlement process (Ambrosini, Bonizzoni & Molli 2021). Thus, religious institutions tend to assume a multi-functional profile in diaspora as, often, are the first points of reference to which migrants turn for questions relating to work, documents, housing, bureaucratic procedures and healthcare assistance (Ley 2008). In this sense, solidarity becomes a central motif of their «mission abroad» (Molli 2022b) and the migratory experience promotes a revision and enlargement of their religious mandate in terms of welcoming and listening. For example, we find the organisation of practices of help, promotion of fundraisings for those who are in need, but also language courses and citizenship classes for sustaining faithful in their new lives.

As we can see, religious minorities combine roots with new functions. In other terms, transplantation is also transformation. Beyond their activism for finding a place and re-organising new spiritual and social services, the national and local context where they arrive is another important factor to consider, especially for what concerns institutional dynamics and juridical norms.

Religious diversity in Italy: de iure vs de facto

The regulation of religion – or at least the tentative of regulate it – by the State is a central and recurring element of European social history (Barbalet, Possamai & Turner 2011). As clearly observed by G. Baumann: «religion, with its claims to ultimate truths and its potential social divisiveness, is the oldest problem of the nation-state» (2002: 42). This is the reason why, when we concentrate and reflect on contemporaneity, we should always consider the implications of earlier periods and past institutional dynamics (Eade 2011). During the process of construction and reinforcement of modern States, phases of «cooperation and conflict» have characterised their rapport with religions. These dynamics, with varying intensity, have led to different types of juridical and political agendas, introduced with the intent to (try to) govern the place of religion in the public sphere.

We may observe that the same issue (or dilemma) is back in the limelight today (Breskaya, Giordan & Richardson 2018; Triandafyllidou & Magazzini 2020) for the fact that minorities, «from below», are questioning existing institutional ways of regulating pluralism (Molli & Eade 2024). Whether and how their religious communities reduce or reinforce trust in and compliance with public institutions represents one of the main contentious themes, especially if we consider – as we have seen before – the role and meaning of faith in the construction of migrant minorities' identity. Italy, in this sense, represents a case of

particular interest, given its historical background as a (quasi) mono-religious country (Magazzini 2020) and, at the same time, given the rapidity of change towards a highly multi-religious scenario. This is the reason why we now inquire into the current legislation and its main instruments in terms of governance of religious diversity.

First, we recall that Italy shows some analogies with other European countries; a *primus inter pares* religion – namely a religion with consolidated and privileged relations with public institutions – exists for historical and symbolical reasons. On the other side, the country shows, instead, peculiarities for what concerns the regulation of relations with religious minorities and the ways in which these can be recognized. These specificities deserve to be explored for comprehending the barriers that migrants meet when they transplant their faiths.

We now succinctly discuss the major sources. The republican constitution affirms and defends the freedom of religion in individual terms (see articles 19 and 20). The article 7 rules the relations between the Italian State and the Catholic Church (according to the Lateran Treaties) and the successive article (n.8) provides the juridical framework in terms of how a religion different from that Catholic can be formally recognised. As commented by A. Ferrari and S. Ferrari, this article «gives a special emphasis to the institutional profile of religious freedom» (2010: 6). More precisely, it offers to non-Catholic faiths the opportunity to be juridically recognised as formal organisations – if they are in accord with the fundamental principles of the Italian legal system – but, and this is the point to consider, their relations with the State are defined by bilateral agreements on the basis of what in Italian is called *intesa*.

The real and controversial question is that the first phase for reaching an agreement begins and develops at a governmental level, between an *ad hoc* commission and representatives of that religion. A draft of the agreement is then prepared, and it is evaluated or revised by the *ad hoc* commission which – it is worth remembering – depends on the government and not on an independent institutional power. After this step, the text passes to the Presidency of the Council, to then be submitted to the Parliament. Thus, we have an asymmetry, namely the government has a strong discretionary power, especially in deciding whether to accept or reject the proposal to negotiate a treaty. Over time, the possibility to have it (i.e. the *Intesa*) has become a critical barrier⁶. The Idos-Confronti dossier (2024) calculates that this legal solution is today accessible to only 10% of those who declare a faith other than Catholic.

Beyond the article n. 8 and the juridical instrument it provides, we can also recall another tool in terms of formal recognition. Religions without official

6 Only thirteen religions have reached an agreement with the Italian state from 1984 to 2019: for details see: https://presidenza.governo.it/USRI/confessioni/intese_indice.html.

agreements with the State (namely without an *Intesa*) are ruled by the (obsolete) law on «admitted cults», which, we remember, dates back to the fascist period (law n. 1159, 24 June 1929). This model is of second order since it limits the access to a series of key benefits (for example, economic supports, religious festivities or relations with public bodies) reserved instead to those religions that have an *intesa* with the Italian State. Moreover, this model has produced an asymmetry among minority religions in Italy: among those who have stronger or weaker forms of recognition.

Considering these juridical sources and their barriers, we find another type of solution that religious communities tend usually to adopt, namely registering in the various formulae of association recognized by common law: as if they were volunteering or civil society actors. This solution has also been called a «mimetic strategy» by Ferrari (2011) since minorities may, in this way, continue to organise meetings, aggregations and activities by following the model of cultural/social associations. In other terms, this can be considered an *oborto collo* preference.

This type of (forced) option creates, however, a series of problems. One of these relates to a delicate theme we have introduced before, such as the establishment or use of buildings for religious purposes. Creating *ex novo* places of worship (or readapting existing places) is a very controversial issue in Italy because there is no national law that regulates with precision their opening. More precisely, it is a contentious juridical matter between «State and regions», and the key problem is that the Italian State has never dictated general guidelines. The result is that we find different laws at regional level. For example, Lombardy – where data were gathered – used, for a long period of time, several limiting regulations, most of which were, step by step, sanctioned by the constitutional court. Specifically, the law n. 2, approved on 3 February 2015, entitled «amendments to the regional law n.12, approved on 11 March 2005» introduced a series of administrative bans against the opening of new places of worship as well as the reconversion of existing buildings for religious purposes. Muslim communities were, especially but not only, the real target of this law; indeed, various political figures called it in interviews and public declarations: *legge anti-moschee* (namely, anti-mosques law).

Beyond the case of Lombardy, we can draw some conclusions in line with the aims we proposed in this paragraph. First, as we can comprehend, religious diversity suffers from lack of legal recognition, especially for those confessions imported by migrant populations. The Italian law poses various limits, and the possibility to negotiate a treaty (the main juridical instrument) depends on government intents. Second, an essential part of religious freedom is the possibility to exercise it in collective forms. Consequently, practicing a religion requires an appropriate place of worship. But, in absence of an updated as well as adequate law, this possibility is limited. More precisely, this right has become a «local level

affair» (Ambrosini, Molli & Cacciapaglia 2024) as it often depends on territorial administrations and their PGTs (planning urban rules) that have a crucial role in determining the possibility for a religious community to obtain and use a place of worship in Italian cities. In other terms, «an urban norm can be used to limit a constitutional right».

The conclusion, therefore, is that religious pluralism encounters important legal restrictions in term of formal recognition but, as the previous paragraphs have demonstrated, exists, and it is widely rooted in various cities. This is what can be called the Italian paradox, or the gap between *de iure* and *de facto* pluralism; in synthesis, reality has gone beyond the rule.

A precarious equilibrium: conflicts, and tactics of acceptance

The hiatus between *de iure* and *de facto* is not only a juridical but a sociological matter. As we have introduced before, this gap has created tensions and conflicts in local territories which, in turn, have often attracted the attention of media and public opinion. On the other hand, migrant minorities try to navigate in this ambiguity for continuing to have a place where to gather and pray. They can use different strategies, such as avoiding visibility, showing a positive image of their role and/or seeking informal recognition through the development of positive relationships with key actors which can guarantee them some forms of protection from conflicts.

The success of these strategies, however, depends on various factors. Among these, we can recall the type of confession, for example Muslim communities are usually under the public opinion radar in terms of phobias (Allievi 2014), or the political attitude of the territorial context and its main players, like institutions or civil society associations, in supporting or denying migrant minorities' efforts in achieving stability and recognition. Our research in Lombardy has identified variable situations, both negative and positive. We start from the problems that minority religions encounter, here summarised in a «hierarchy of exclusion».

The first position in this scale is occupied by Islam. Even if Muslim communities generally follow the mimetic strategic – namely they adopt the model of cultural associations for continuing to organise spiritual activities – various conflicts may arise, especially for the readaptation of secular buildings (like old factories or warehouses) for religious purposes. Not always but often, municipality bans are used with the intent to close these sites, producing a series of juridical disputes in administrative courts. Some of these confrontations gain national visibility, other remain invisible (a theme we discuss further).

Beyond Islam, also the presence of Sikh minorities may create tensions. Eight of the seventeen temples we studied for our research in Lombardy declared to have met unwelcoming reactions by the local communities, including administrative restrictions for the readaptation of buildings in temples. Not differently, we also met cases of Pentecostal churches (generally those frequented by African groups) that were sanctioned and closed (see also Pace 2021).

Buddhism was an interesting case. Although in common ideas it represents, *par excellence*, the «religion of peace», when temples are recreated by migrant minorities (principally by Sri Lankans) there can be difficulties, especially in terms of perceived security. In the neighbourhoods where migrants readapted their places of worship, we registered that local communities have initially expressed preoccupations and anxiety for the presence of «foreigners».

The case of Christian immigrants is quite different as they use sites (churches) that are existing buildings which don't require specific administrative permits. However, it is interesting to elaborate on their experience as «familiar minorities» in local territories. Generally, the Orthodox have in use churches conceded by Catholic dioceses (in line with good ecumenic relations). While we didn't observe (overt) discrimination against them (this is especially true in the last decade, when East European migrants have gained a good public image), they however expressed problems in terms of space, since that they generally use old or disused churches which are not always the setting that they prefer for organising spiritual and social activities. In this sense, they often perceive limits since they are hosted, and they would like to expand their potentiality in terms of aggregation given the large presence of Orthodox in various Italian cities. For catholic migrants, even though their presence is «unnoticeable» and not object of (overt) discriminations, they are often considered as «a parallel body» by the Italian parishes. Their religious life typically develops without strong interactions with the local catholic communities who consider them more as guests than as brothers.

As we can see, the settlement of minority religions and their recognition is not without criticisms. At the same time, it is equally interesting to discuss how these communities try, despite problems, to continue to promote worships and social activities. Some of them adopt the strategy of distancing themselves from Islam. For example, Sikhs and Buddhists often declare that they are not like Muslims, namely those who are generally stigmatised in common discourses and media. Moreover, also among Muslim associations, some try to distance themselves from what they call «bad Muslim communities». Sociologically, this is a «game of mirrors»: a rhetorical strategy for demonstrating to be different from what people consider dangerous.

In addition, migrants try to combat local discriminations and attain recognition by stressing a good image of «decorum, impeccability and order». In this sense, religious spaces are also sites where to (try to) show a respectable image,

especially in terms of secure contexts away from marginality and deviance: all representations that Italians often associate to foreigners. They can also stress their role as promoters of welfare practices (see previous paragraphs) working for the social integration of members. Some communities started to promote school projects or guided tours, in the form of what we can define the «aestheticization of religious diversity», namely they organise events in which to present the theological contents of their religion to local people, or they open the doors of their spaces to the public, showing that these are not a dangerous place, as well as they promote cultural appointments based on music and traditional food.

These are all strategies aimed at creating a sort of «tacit acceptance». In other terms, these are the ways they adopt to continue to pray avoiding conflict and tension, promoting a different image of their presence in territories. Not always these efforts work, as in the case of Muslim communities, but they serve to maintain a «precarious equilibrium».

Conclusion. Problems and premises for the future.

We discussed religious pluralism in Italy and in direct relation to migratory processes as these, in the last three decades, were the principal reason for its significant enlargement. For framing this transition, which is an historical novelty for a country with a strong mono-religious background, we considered four key arguments which were explored thanks to a series of data gathered in a comparative research project.

The first interpretative lens concerned spatial dynamics, as the arrival of minority religions has changed the sacred geography of urban and extra-urban territories. We identified three different patterns of how migrants have both readjusted and revived old or abandoned buildings for their religious purposes. Why they reused these places has been another subject. Precisely, we found that religious spaces have become multifunctional hubs for a wide range of spiritual and secular needs. In this sense, religion re-acquires various functions in migration, and we have also seen interesting processes of «transformation in transplantation» (Ambrosini, Molli & Naso 2022).

Another pivotal issue regarded the question of recognition. Here the discussion considered the main legal sources and their intrinsic limits. The Italian law is, in this sense, out of focus compared to a reality in evolution. We have also specified the role of the local level (Giorgi & Itcaina 2016; Becci, Burchardt & Giorda 2017) given the fact that a constitutional right, the religious freedom, can be conditioned by an administrative veto. In this sense, there is an evident hiatus between *de iure* pluralism, namely how diversity is juridically ruled, and *de facto* pluralism, that is the capillary presence of new minorities in various cities. In other terms, we have an «Italian paradox».

This is the reason why, in the last paragraph, we also used the oxymoron of «precarious equilibrium» to grasp how migrant minorities, despite they often lack adequate juridical and civic recognition, continue to experience their religious traditions. They try to navigate this sort of ambiguity by adopting strategies of «tacit acceptance», based on avoiding an excessive visibility and showing «deservedness».

More in general, we can observe the fact that current ideas and modes of regulation of religious diversity are challenged by the arrival of new minorities (Colombo 2015). National policies on the issue are hesitant and distant for the moment in Italy, especially in a period marked by strong conflicts for many phenomena linked to migration. Also at the local level, the creation of new places of worship has often generated political and media controversies. Here, we can also see the implications of a type of populism that uses Christianity as an identitarian tool. Religion becomes a question of folkloric messages deprived of their theological content and exploited in defence of «our cultural roots». These messages serve to present a renewed (and pathological) sense of community against the coming of new minorities in local territories or, in other terms, against those are violating the historical «sacredness» of our geography.

Beyond «policies», some important «practices» of religious diversity are however growing in Italy. Courageous attempts to create channels of interaction and dialogue with new minorities can be observed (e.g., Colombo & Peano Cavasola 2023). These are usually promoted by civil society actors and representatives of the Catholic Church who organise interreligious meetings. How these «practices» promoted from below will evolve towards more institutionalised results will be a fact to monitor and analyse.

Even if dealing with religious pluralism is not an easy issue to resolve for modern European states, innovative solutions that can go beyond the closure towards the arrival of new minority religions or the idea of a *tabula rasa* against the presence of any religious identities in public sphere can be imagined and negotiated. The geographical movement of people around the world is enriching and renewing the panorama of religions in many and unexpected ways (Levitt 2007): this process can be viewed as a *crisis*, but also as a *chance* for the future.

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Chapter 7

Multiculturalism in Educational Practices: The Italian Case

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Abstract

The anthropological lens suggests a deconstruction of multicultural education: it cannot be pursued if we do not critically unpack the meaning of culture. Drawing on some ethnographic cases in the Italian context, we identify three potential pitfalls associated with a naive misconception of culture: generating excesses of culture, reifying culture, and overlooking differences within cultures.

Policy discourse in continental Europe has recognised the need for a dynamic and constructivist conceptualisation of culture to replace the “multicultural” educational model with the “intercultural” one. Italian school policy has embraced the latter, which can enable promising educational practices if practitioners share a critical understanding of its theoretical and axiological assumptions.

⁷ Angela Biscaldi wrote sections 2 and 3, Anna Chinazzi wrote sections 1 and 4, while the Conclusions were jointly written. The chapter is the result of a reflection of the authors with a group of undergraduate students within the course of Cultural Anthropology (a.y. 2022-2023), Degree in Social Sciences for Globalisation, Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Milan. Many thanks to the students: Ferraguto Paolo, Khachi Ibtisam, Koni Ingrid, La Notte Angela Francesca, Prota Giada, Robbiati Laura, Scalone Davide, Wijenayake Vihara.

Overview of the Italian educational context

The Constitution of the Italian Republic (1948) established the principles of the Italian education system, mandating compulsory education for a minimum of eight years (art. 34), later extended to ten years (Law 296/2006), covering the ages from 6 to 16. Compulsory education includes five years of primary school (*Scuola primaria*), three years of middle school (*Scuola secondaria di I grado*, commonly referred to as *Scuola media*) and the first two years of secondary school (*Scuola secondaria di II grado*, also known as *Scuola superiore*). The following years can be completed either in general or vocational upper secondary schools or within the regional training system. Figure 1 illustrates the structure of the Italian education system, spanning from early childhood education and care (ECEC) to post-secondary non-tertiary education.

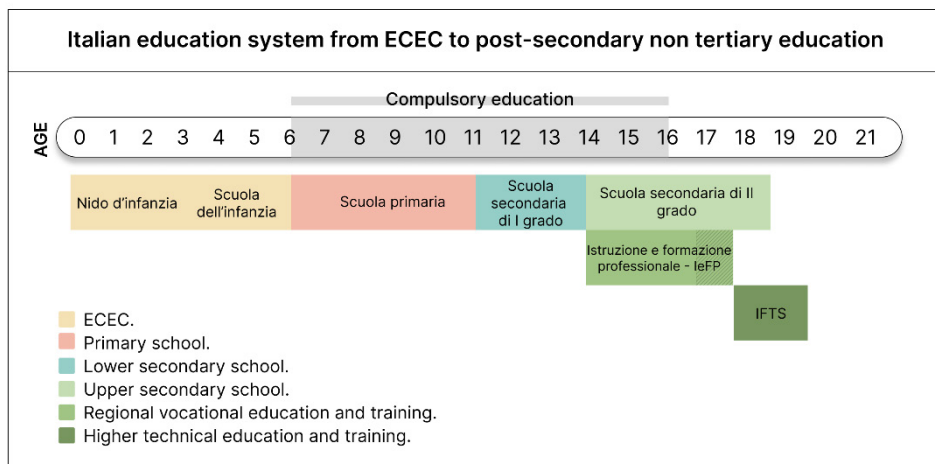


Figure 1 Italian education system from Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) to post-secondary non-tertiary education. Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Italy has historically been a country of emigration and more recently, since the 1970s, a country of significant immigration. In recent decades, the Italian population has become more linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse, impacting the social fabric of schools and related policies. According to the data collected by the Ministry of Education, in the school year 2020/2021 there were 865.388 students of non-Italian nationality enrolled in the public education system, i.e., 10.3% of the total school population, unevenly distributed across the national territory. Students with non-Italian nationality are predominately located in the northern regions (65.3%), followed by the central regions (22.2%) and finally the south (12.5%). Students with migrant backgrounds statistically face

higher levels of poverty, academic risk, and dropout rates (MIM, 2023). Despite a recent decline, possibly due the European economic crisis and socio-economic developments in emigration countries, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity remains a structural aspect of the Italian school system.

School policy regulates the distribution of non-Italian pupils, setting a 30% threshold for each class (MIUR, 2014). In multi-ethnic areas, the high percentage of migrant students has been associated with the phenomenon of “white flight” (Cordini et al., 2019), where many Italian families relocate to more homogenous areas.

The Italian educational policy adopts an inclusive approach to categorising special educational needs (*bisogni educativi speciali*, often abbreviated as BES), encompassing not only students with disabilities or specific developmental disorders (e.g., specific learning difficulties, ADHD, language deficits), but also students with socio-economic, linguistic, and cultural disadvantages. Consequently, students with migration backgrounds often fall into this category—a controversial issue as this may inadvertently perpetuate processes of micro-exclusions (Migliarini et al., 2020).

All categories of learners within the SEN spectrum are educated in mainstream settings: there are no special schools or classrooms. In instances where students with disabilities require extra support, dedicated teachers are assigned to promote inclusive practices, typically within the classroom setting. According to the current policies, however, all teachers are expected to collaborate and promote inclusion through personalised and/or individualised strategies for SEN pupils.

In the “superdiverse” landscape of contemporary Italian schools (Vertovec, 2007; Zoletto, 2023), teachers are tasked not only with mastering their respective discipline but also with a nuanced understanding of cultural diversity. In the following paragraphs, we will discuss how the multiculturalist approach can insidiously manifest if it lacks grounding in anthropological reflection.

Multicultural round dance

When my son Giovanni was four, he attended kindergarten in the centre of a small town in northern Italy, in a district recently repopulated by immigrant families; about eighty per cent of the school population consisted of migrant families: Romanian, Moldavian, Chinese, Moroccan, Indian. Daily life in nursery school was the same as in any other nursery school: the children played and fought, and the fights were settled, without any difficulty.

In the mornings the mothers would gather for coffee in a nearby café and discuss the typical challenges of motherhood: eating, sleeping, tantrums, tiredness. A friendship blossomed among us mothers, and little attention was paid to each other’s cultural background. Of course, we were aware of our diverse

origins; references to our backgrounds occasionally crept into our conversations without much weight attached to them. We were Mariana, Cecilia, Linda, Jasmine, tall or short, nice or unpleasant, punctual or late, good cooks or not...

That year the director of educational policy decided to send her kindergarten teachers on a training course on multiculturalism. The high percentage of immigrant children worried the management, with rumours suggesting the presence of major and specific problems although neither my son Giovanni or I had noticed any.

A few weeks before Christmas, the teacher stopped some of us mothers and told us that, based on this multicultural project, the school had organised a multicultural round dance; some mothers were asked to represent their "ethnicity". So, the round dance would be made up of a Moldovan mother, a Romanian mother, a Chinese mother, an Indian mother, and I had been chosen as the Italian mother.

As soon as the teachers made this request and the mothers discussed the party, we were all surprised to ask ourselves a few questions: what ethnic group do I belong to? Am I an authentic representative of that ethnicity? And what ethnicity do you belong to? Who are you, really?

All of us mothers found ourselves asking these questions, and where before we were mothers, with typical problems of mothers dictated by many variables, we suddenly began seeing ourselves as representatives of a culture and our children began to ask us which culture their partner came from, what they ate in their culture, what customs they had, and the cultural difference entered our coffee conversations.

Where before there was Marianna, a beautiful blonde with two children, a cleaner, we now saw a Moldavian woman; where before there was Kleta, we now saw a Greek woman, and for a long time the discourses of cultural belonging entered our everyday lives.

In this context, I have always wondered whether multiculturalism has created differences where there were none before or has improved our understanding of cultural differences.

It certainly taught us to look at ourselves differently. But, *has it created unnecessary differences or has it increased our sensitivity and understanding of diversity?*

The traps of multiculturalism

While presenting an improvement over ethnocentrism, the metaphor of multiculturalism as wealth, which affirms the value of cultural differences and the need to understand and communicate with them, is not exempt of its own challenges.

The most problematic outcome of the multiculturalist metaphor (represented visually by the mosaic world, in which the different pieces of the puzzle are

the different cultures) is the reifying effect of different cultures that it implies, as well as the tendency to exaggerate the role of culture in conflicting interactions to the detriment of other dimensions that produce inequality and are instead obscured (such as those of gender, generation, economic and social capital).

This overestimation of the importance and cultural motivations of behaviours paradoxically ends up creating differences when they are emphasised.

In the same way the metaphor of development perpetuates notions of inferiority by categorising countries into a dichotomy of “first” and “third” worlds, and developed and less developed nations, *the metaphor of cultural diversity seeks and creates cultural differences where instead there exist fluid and dynamic everyday practices of social coexistence.*

Let us take as an example the story that concludes the book *Eccessi di Culture* (2004) by the Italian anthropologist Marco Aime:

I would like to quote an anecdote told to me by Don Piero Gallo, parish priest of San Salvatio, a district of Turin with a strong immigrant presence. In a nursery school in the neighbourhood, attended by many North African children, the teachers decided one day to prepare couscous. They searched for the “original” recipe to cook it according to tradition. The children were delighted. Then the teacher asked a little Moroccan: “Do you like it?”

“Yes”

“Is it like what your mum makes?”

“My mum’s is better because she puts a layer of couscous, a layer of tortellini, a layer of couscous...” (2004:136, translated by Angela Biscaldi)

In this typical example of multicultural education, an approach encouraged in many schools, culture is emphasised, and overvalued, taking it out of that natural process dynamics that characterises it. This attitude ends up creating differences where instead there are spontaneous practices of coexistence and social transformation: the Moroccan child is seen as the bearer of a different culture that takes the form of a different cuisine, while his family has already embarked on a process of transformation and hybridisation.

In the case of Giovanni’s nursery school, the mothers had been engaged for years in a process of negotiation and dialogue that gave new meaning to the everyday practices of the country of origin.

In fact, the multiculturalist gap risks freezing cultures, favouring the idea that “stable cultures” exist over time and that the people who belong to them have an identity that is always the same.

As Marzo Mazzetti writes:

We have a tendency to consider a foreigner present in our country as the same person they were before leaving their country... Well, that’s not the case. The very act of migrating, coming into contact with a new world, to which it is necessary to adapt, modifies the person, transforms the way in which they see themselves,

in a word their identity”

(Mazzetti, 2003: 82, translated by Angela Biscaldi)

The anthropologist Marco Aime (2004) underlines how the events following 11 September 2001 have increased the tendency to associate peoples with cultures and religions, thus redrawing a map of the world on an ethnic or religious basis. We are witnessing, says the author, an excess of attention toward cultures, diversity, and identities. The problem is that the emphasis is always on the differences and not on the common elements, neglecting the fact that cultures are made up of all the elements that have passed through them over time, causing them to lose their original purity.

Thus, other causes of misunderstandings between individuals or groups – such as economic or gender differences – are underestimated in order to overestimate cultural differences.

Often a “cultural” classification of individuals is carried out, which ends up forcing an individual to wear the “uniform” of the culture of origin. The use of collective and including categories, which homogenise identities and histories, creates the unique identity of the “foreigner”, “culturally different”.

The anthropologist Marco Mazzetti (2003) recounts the following episode to illustrate this trend in schools:

Lin is a Chinese child, he is 8 years old, and he arrived a week ago from his country, where he grew up with his grandparents, to re-join his parents. He is taken to school, where he sits politely at the desk indicated by the teacher. He does not speak a word of Italian and has a frightened look on his face. We can perhaps imagine how he feels. He left his home, the grandparents who had been his real caregivers and he is suddenly living with his mother and father, whom he hardly knows. He is being taken to a school full of children who speak a language he does not understand and who stare at him curiously. To Lin they may seem hostile, dangerous. At some point, during the lesson, he crouches under his desk, puts his head between his hands, and starts rocking back and forth. The teacher does not know what to do, she does not understand. She wonders what this behaviour might mean in Chinese culture. At the end of the class, the teacher discusses it with her colleagues, but no one can come up with an explanation. They regret the absence of a cultural mediator and wonder how they can find an answer. During the next lesson, the strange behaviour is repeated with another teacher and the discussion continues during the following break. The teachers understand that the child needs something, but they cannot figure out what it is. They do not know anything about Chinese culture. Luckily, the school doctor is present that morning and the teachers involve him in the discussion, which he becomes passionate about. After a few minutes, the colleague has a great idea and proposes to visit the child: he takes the stethoscope out of his bag and brilliantly diagnoses a mild case of otitis. The case is closed (Mazzetti, 2003: 52, translated by Angela Biscaldi)

The question is:

Could policies advocating for multiculturalism inadvertently contribute to these “cultural excesses”? Is there a risk that multiculturalism might impede the spontaneous processes of cultural coexistence and change?

Furthermore, another effect of the metaphor of multiculturalism is to present cultures as homogeneous within themselves. This is what anthropology defines as the fiction of cultural homogeneity. *Indeed, the multiculturalist metaphor seems to forget and obscure the fact that cultural differences operate within societies and not just between societies.*

As Susan Moller Okin (1999) pointed out, multicultural policies advocate for the protection of minority cultures through special group rights or privileges. Proponents argue that such groups have distinct social cultures that provide their members with meaningful ways of life in both the public and private spheres: “because social cultures play such a pervasive and fundamental role in the lives of their members, and because these cultures are threatened with extinction, minority cultures should be protected with special rights” (Moller Okin, 1999: 5-6).

However, multiculturalism is naïve in that it fails to recognise and address the fact that these communities are not homogenous, monolithic blocks. The defence of minority communities often coincides with the defence of the interests of the subjects who have the power to speak on behalf of the communities – the most powerful, the richest, the men... – and forgetting the weakest subjects within the same minorities.

Susan Moller Okin effectively draws attention to the tension between, for example, multiculturalism and women’s rights.

What to do, Okin asks, when the demands of minority cultures clash with the norm of gender equality, at least formally promoted by liberal states?

If a woman from a more patriarchal culture comes to the United States, for example, why should she be less protected from male violence than other women? Because she belongs to a “protected minority”?

By deconstructing the concept of multiculturalism, cultural anthropology teaches us to look at the distribution of meanings present in each culture, and even more so between cultural groups, showing that the real problem is not how to defend cultural minorities, but rather how to understand – and practice – a commitment to equality and justice in a world made up of multiple differences, hierarchies of power, distribution of privileges, and inequalities in living conditions.

In this sense, Ugo Fabietti, echoing the concern already expressed by Arjun Appadurai (1996), invites us to be wary of the omni-explanatory use of the concept of culture today:

If in the anthropological context, culture refers to a set of structured and learned mental and practical behaviours, that always need to be explained, that is, described and made coherent, “outside anthropology” culture has come to mean something different, not completely different, but different enough to sometimes overturn the purposes with which anthropologists have always used it.

In the non-anthropological context, for example, culture does not need to be explained; rather, it is something that “explains”: it explains behaviour, tastes, political ideas, those relating to the relationship between the sexes, and often extends to aspects like economy, social organisation, and worldviews, both of the sensible and the super sensible one. It explains the ethnic wars in Africa and the Balkans, it explains the difficulties of integrating immigrants from poor countries into European and North American megalopolises, it explains the tensions between whites and blacks and Hispanics in the cities of the United States, it explains both the “economic miracles” of some Asian countries and their recurring crises. It explains 9/11 and, of course, the “clash of civilizations”.

How is it, then, that a concept developed by anthropologists as a guide to ethnographic practice, i.e., for locally circumstantial descriptions and explanations of socially apprehended human behaviours and dispositions, has become a “catch-all explanation concept” outside anthropology? (Fabietti, 2004, translated by Angela Biscaldi).

Moving away from the metaphor of “cultural difference” therefore means moving away from culturalism, the representation of cultures as discontinuous isolates, using the concept of anthropological culture not in a constitutive but rather regulative sense, beginning to analyse in depth the complexity of social contexts and not simply dismissing problems as “cultural”.

Towards an intercultural approach to education

From an international policy perspective, multicultural education has been the dominant response to the increasing diversity or “superdiversity” (Vertovec, 2007) of the contemporary scenario. Multicultural education is not a prescriptive set of pedagogical methods; on the contrary, it has been associated with different conceptualisations, perspectives, and practices. In the last decades, the principles of multicultural education have been developed along with the anthropological debate around culture, moving from a static and homogeneous conceptualisation to a dynamic one.

Since the late 1980s, the shift in the conceptualisation of culture has also generated a semantic controversy on “multicultural” education in the European academic debate. In order to better reflect the new concept of culture and a renovated ethos of dealing with cultural diversity in educational settings, the model of “intercultural” education model has been preferred. Encounter, dialogue, confrontation, and interaction are identified as key values of this approach (Portera & Milani, 2021). The emphasis is not only on reducing marginalisation

and fostering a peaceful coexistence of different cultural identities, but also on mutual exchange and interaction with different people.

The intercultural approach is said to move beyond the multicultural model: for many European policymakers and educational experts, multiculturalism evokes the descriptive and static idea of different cultural identities coexisting in a certain context, while interculturalism is associated with an agentic practice and intentional effort that better reflect the dynamic conceptualisation of culture. The intercultural approach should aim for a deeper transformation of pedagogy, foregrounding students' empowerment, and promoting social change (Faas et al., 2014).

While the concept of multicultural education still prevails in the Anglo-Saxon world and other countries, the intercultural approach is spread across continental Europe, including Italy (Tarozzi, 2012: 397). Despite the different labels, the conceptualisation behind them may or may not be the same across different national policies.

In Europe, migration policies are generally designed at the national level, but the supranational guidance of the EU institutions is becoming increasingly important. From the beginning of the 1990s, the Italian educational system has institutionally embraced the "paradigm of intercultural education" (Contini, 2017), as reflected in some policymaking landmarks (e.g., MIUR, 2007; 2015; MI, 2022), which adopts a constructivist perspective of cultural diversity, as made of hybrid and unstable identities constructed through social interaction.

The Italian way of intercultural education aims to foster integration, interaction, dialogue, and mutual transformation among students from different cultural backgrounds (Fiorucci, 2015b). Rather than focusing solely on interventions targeting specific social groups, it functions as a pedagogical overarching paradigm to the curricula for all students (Fiorucci, 2020). In this sense, intercultural education strategies should combat ethnocentric tendencies, also through a revision of existing teaching content. Addressing the "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970) embedded in curricula may involve exploring counter-hegemonic perspectives or, at least, ensuring that students are aware of the (perhaps inevitable) ethnocentric nature of the learning materials. As an example, As suggested by Fiorucci (2015a), including Italian emigration history in the curriculum could contribute to the development of an intercultural ethos among students.

Despite policy mandates, in many school contexts there remains a disparity between policy ideals and actual practice, which makes intercultural education a "ghost model" (Tarozzi, 2012), often limited to episodic activities and folksy and "traditional" representations of students' countries of origin (Portera & Milani, 2021).

Conclusions

Schools serve as micro-social contexts not only for comprehending but also for actively striving to improve the wider society (Bove, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). To achieve this goal, it is crucial to combat ethnocentric tendencies and promote an intercultural stance, beginning with educators themselves (Bove et al., 2023). Recognising the pivotal role of educational contexts, specific policies have been implemented across the world to regulate contemporary “multicultural” schools.

In our chapter, educational practices are analysed through an anthropological lens in order to highlight the potential pitfalls associated with the multicultural approach to education. While striving for equity and inclusion in educational settings, it is essential for practitioners to undergo training and be cognisant of the fact that culture is a heuristic concept. Thus, it is useful to comprehend patterns of behaviours of individuals, but it cannot be considered as an all-encompassing explanatory framework. A “constitutive” use of the notion of culture over a “regulative” and heuristic one is inappropriate as it perpetuates the idea of crystalised and reified cultures. This approach risks overlooking commonalities among people, while obscuring internal differences within societies.

In many countries, such as Italy, the critical discourse surrounding the concept of culture has prompted a shift from the multicultural to the intercultural approach in education. Regardless of the label, either multi- or inter-cultural approaches need to be grounded in meaningful theoretical reflections to consistently inform educational practices.

Cultural anthropology offers a critical lens for analysing multicultural processes, recognising them as dynamic and contextual phenomena. Through the anthropological perspective, educational practitioners can develop reflexivity and flexibility (Bove et al., 2023), enabling them to identify and address their own prejudices and thus avoid the pitfalls associated with a naïve and reified conceptualisation of culture.

For these reasons, we argue that cultural anthropology should always play a role in teacher education. By encouraging an attitude of cultural decentralisation and critical thinking, the anthropological perspective enriches the pedagogical gaze and contributes to its humanisation.

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Chapter 8

The Language Question: Politics, Policy and Possibility of Multilingualism in India

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Abstract

The Indian subcontinent has seen diverse political mobilisations around the language question; claiming a fairer share of federal power, demanding a more respectable position in the educational process, as a space for political assertion as well as a medium of tactical negotiations. Since the recommendations of the University Education Commission of 1949 till the latest National Education Policy of 2020, the conflicted terrain of language has contributed to the power struggles amongst the varied politico-linguistic interests across the nation. This paper attempts to look into the evolution of the language policy in India, focusing on the relationship between the regional political assertion for states and marginalisation of minor languages within these states.

Introduction

In his *Critique of Violence*, Walter Benjamin raises the question: “[I]s any non-violent resolution of conflict possible?”. He answers this question with the help of languages, which according to him is part of ‘the sphere of understanding’, ‘in courtesy, trust and sympathy’, ‘which is not accessible to violence’ (1996: 244-5). Influential scholars like Habermas, while rethinking the public lives in the West and the embedded complexities have shared this idea of language being the most significant medium of reconciliation and mediation, of rational and non-violent negotiations, as opposed to the use of brute force and confrontation. As he poignantly puts it “[R]eaching an understanding is the inherent telos of human speech” (1984: 287). Habermas states on language that ‘what raises us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we can know:

language. Through its structure, autonomy and responsibility are posited for us' (1971: 3). Scholarship in socialisation and multiculturalism also have shown that the ability to speak, which makes human beings foundationally distinct from animals create the possibilities of rational, non-violent communication and conflict resolution and hence language rights are central to the larger paradigm of ethno-cultural rights (Kymlicka 2003). Even those who critique the Western liberal notions of consensus based on language, can hardly undermine the significance of language as the complex matrix of human existence. In this essay, we shall address a peculiar political- historical trajectory of 'the language question' as part of a claim of distinctness and uniqueness as well as at the centre of a series of (violent and not-so-violent) political mobilisations in post-colonial India.

The Indian subcontinent has seen some of the most heated debates on federal power-sharing, in the form of reorganisation of states on linguistic lines and on conferring the official language status on a chosen language that could represent India as a nation, both internally and externally. Moreover, the language question was pertinent as the medium of instruction in education since the initial years of independence and it is far from being resolved. These three issues, one pertaining to the role of language as the uniting factor in a postcolonial nation, wounded by partition and massive violence evident in the search for the official language, second, as a distinct identity, strong and coherent enough to demand federal reorganisation of the modern nation-state, and finally the significance of the complex relationship between education and language as a medium of instruction will be discussed here.

Paul R Brass (1990) identifies three major aspects of the 'language question' in post independent India; that of the official language, of linguistic state reorganisation and minority languages within states (significantly their status in education). He argues that the language policies of the Nehruvian regime were less-interventionist, yet consistent with the challenges of the time. They created a centre and margins within each state, through the linguistic state reorganisation. The pluralist policies of Nehruvian state were mostly restricted to the national level, and states were free to resolve their internal conflicts about minor languages in the spirit of federalism. Brass goes onto argue that the post-Nehruvian governments were interventionist, manipulative, and centralising in language policies like in most other political questions. This approach of the Centre in turn aggravated the preferential treatment of certain regional languages over others which directly contributed to the crises of the 1970s and 80s, as evident in the case of Assam.

This chapter focuses on the interlinkages between the three aspects of Brass' delineation of the language question. We ask how the question of finding a balance between Hindi and English (also see how Sanskrit was looked upon) in their tussle for the official language status influenced the movement for

language-based political movements for state reorganisation and in turn how the political compromises the centre and states entered into on the resolution of this crises gave rise to what this paper argues as the aggressive standardisation and rigid classification of regional languages thereby further marginalising the ‘minor mother tongues’, especially belonging to different Tribal communities under dominant linguistic assertions. These minor languages, with or without a history of writing, suffered the brunt of modernisation of the dominant vernaculars that tried to encompass maximum cultural might to argue its case against the potential hegemony of a ‘national language’ like the one the advocates of Hindi proposed.

Moreover, the more recent attempts towards ‘internationalisation’ of the curriculum in the higher education sphere, while ‘imposing that “the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language” (NEP 2020, 13) will intensify the existing disparities. Hence, the relationship between language rights and equity within a multicultural polity pose a formidable challenge to political thinkers. We would like to situate this relationship in the conceptual matrix of ‘Indian multiculturalism’ and evaluate the tensions and possibilities the margins might present.

In other words, this chapter argues that the relationship between language and power – as it translates into access to resources, prestige, and well-being in general – in post-independent India is a complex issue, interlinked with historical, economic, political and cultural negotiations between different elite groups and reflected in the language policy. The ability to mobilise themselves into viable and formidable political communities that can assertively enter into electoral and legal bargains with state power is the most determining factor in the development of any minor linguistic groups. We will look at the dominant approach to this policy in transition, from the three-language formula (TLF) to the National Education Policy-2020.

The official narrative of language policy surprisingly has not changed substantially since its inception in the form of the workings of the University Education Commission in 1948 until the latest draft of the New Education Policy in 2020. Are there any insights available in the interactions between the official narratives and the regional political mobilisation (or a stark absence of it) on language – both on its official recognition and on the status of medium of instruction – for ‘Indian multiculturalism’?

Indian Multiculturalism: What do Languages Say?

At first, let us draw a short map of the phrase ‘Indian multiculturalism’, placed in quotation marks to emphasise its contested nature and varied depictions in academia. Scholars of multiculturalism disagree on whether India

can legitimately be called ‘multicultural’ as it is neither a recognised concept by the constitution nor does the perpetual and seemingly irreconcilable conflicts seem fundamentally different to the ‘political’ varieties of multiculturalism seen in the West in the modern era as a response of large-scale immigration. Multiculturalism presupposes the procedural and normative engagement about diversity between the state and civil society whereby diversity is respected and sanctions made available to curtail any discrimination based on cultural identities.

Other scholars have recognised the longer-standing encounter of multicultural identities in the non-West, especially in India than in most Western societies. This line of engagement has come from the liberal academia that aims to rectify the colonial interpretations of Indian history and the oriental gaze, by acknowledging the diversity in India as an organically evolved phenomena that enables the particular nation-building strategies, rather than a historical hindrance to the growth and development. However, most vehemently this argument of exceptionalism (Madan, & Nandy, 1998) surfaced in the works of some of the post-colonial cultural critiques whereby it is impossible, if not unethical to study the multicultural diversity of the region using ‘Western principles’ like equal citizenship and secularism that suffer from a rather short-term and procedural approach to ‘the immigrant problem’.

Rochana Bajpai calls out this argument of multicultural exceptionalism of India for its limitations and argue that Indian society has undergone several of the constraints on multicultural policies that are mapped out in the case of the West (2011, 2015). She points to a ‘normative deficit’ in the constitutional framework of India, while addressing the questions of group-rights on the basis of religious, linguistic and other cultural differences as opposed to the notion of ‘backwardness’ with regard to caste and class. Moreover, she argues that this ‘normative deficit’ that can be traced back to the Constituent Assembly debates themselves continues to influence Indian politics significantly and this is a central reason as to why “a resurgent Hindu right” has been criticising the state assistance to minority cultures “as an illegitimate concession motivated by electoral considerations” (Bajpai 2015: 2).

Disagreeing with the postcolonial approaches to the problem of Indian multiculturalism, Bajpai provides a distinct argument that the liberal approach of the early years ‘inherently lacks the normative-ideological resources required for the accommodation of group-differentiated rights’ (Bajpai 2015). She argues that in India, like many other postcolonial nations, the challenge has been the inability of the state to construct a stable ‘normative-ideological’ structure to spell out the multicultural rights, without overtly restricting them on the basis of national integration. This structure needs to overcome the fears of ‘Balkanization’ and leave behind the disrepute vis-à-vis the recognition of group rights that colonial rule instilled in terms of their divide and rule policies.

The nation-state needs to embrace the notion of multicultural diversity from a normative approach to democratic rights of minorities rather than as a vote-bank concern or as a reason for India's backwardness. Bajpai points out the fear and mistrust embedded in the usage of the term minority in post-independent India, primarily referring to those communities that pose potential threat to the nation's integrity and most importantly to the majority community i.e. the Hindus. The current debates about the Uniform Civil Code proposals in India unravels many of these underlying discomforts and resistances.

A different approach to the question of Indian multiculturalism, not based on state policies rather from the arena of language practices like literature comes from UR Ananthamurthy who argues that the organic evolution and co-existence of cultures has made many regions in India multilingual by default. Poets and philosophers wrote in languages as well as *bhashas*, the common tongues of masses. He points out that this syncretism was reflected in the critical consciousness of Bhakthi movement long before the advent of Western ideas through colonialism. Democratisation of faith and god happened during this phase, primarily through the choice of people's *bhashas* over Sanskrit or Persian. What he calls 'an egalitarian passion' passed through these *bhashas*, eventually transforming religion, politics and society. Ananthamurthy calls Gandhi as the last of these 'critical insiders' who held onto the significance of common languages in living sovereign lives (Ananthamurthy, 2000 pp. 39). This multilingualism was compromised during the colonial period due to standardisation and homogenisation of languages. It is important to perceive unity in diversity, a much cliched phrase, as a process according to Ananthamurthy as disproportionate stress on one aspect will bring the other to forefront, unleashing contestation. Difference and hybridity are key to languages, expressed best in literatures (Ananthamurthy, 2000). In light of the above discussions, we will proceed to look at the possibility of a normative framework for the language question in India focussing on the triad of group rights, language rights and equity.

Will Kymlicka (2001) has argued that minorities face a greater challenge in realising the rights given to them in any institutional setting as their requirements for a meaningful public and private life does not fall under the 'normal' or 'mainstream'. In India as well, it is still unclear to what extent the group-rights could be unpacked as positive rights based on state involvement or as negative rights based on non-intervention by the state. Hence, any provision by the state to ensure these rights could be interpreted as 'appeasement policy' or 'vote-bank' politics.

Pierre Bourdieu has pointed out that there was a renewed interest towards language policy and language education in the 1990s, which can be attributed to the growing focus on minority communities within nation-states and their disadvantaged position. Especially, in the post-Soviet nations, the need to 'solve' the emerging problems of linguistic identities was strong. The attempt focussed

on creating a 'unifying national language' along the lines of the western countries as it was assumed that attaining 'public linguistic homogeneity' is central to modernization and development, understood as the sole trajectory available to any aspiration for modern nationalism.

[The official language] is the one which, within the territorial limits of that unit, imposes itself on the whole population as the only legitimate language... The official language is bound up with the state, both in its genesis and its social uses... this state language becomes the theoretical norm against which all linguistic practices are objectively measured. (Bourdieu 1991, 45)

In order to overcome the totalising and homogenising tendency of this approach, Bourdieu talks about an approach of 'embeddedness' i.e. accepting the 'social and political contexts of language policy and language education' instead of looking at languages in isolation; at their linguistic structure alone. This unravels a significant aspect of the foundational violence associated with the emergence of the modern nation-state that is translated for political negotiations and governance into the 'language problem'.

This is more complex and subtle in the case of language policies in India. On the one hand, the linguistic state-reorganisation provided an infrastructure for vernaculars to become tongues of power and dominance through official status and educational status. It could be argued that despite the tentative tone of the Constituent Assembly debates on regional languages, pursuing vernacular language development and in turn the cultural identity associated with a language is seen as a legitimate endeavour in the Indian variant of multiculturalism. Multilingual education (henceforth MLE) based on TLF became the cornerstone of this idea though it brought about significant political challenges from the Southern regions⁸. Many argued that MLE is not simply the presence of multiple languages in the curriculum as long as these languages are placed in power-hierarchy. In MLE, the relationship between language has to be re-worked from a notion of building symmetrical power relations between the instructors and the learners. As Paulo Freire has articulated, if the ultimate purpose of education is to build critical consciousness in the learner, one first of all needs to internalise his/her position as a critic.

In India, this power hierarchy and its consequences have to be understood not only as a tussle between Hindi (especially in its official form devoid of Urdu or Arabic) and other dominant languages like Tamil, Bengali or Telugu, but also (even more importantly so) as the marginalisation of minor languages⁹ (tribal

8 We will discuss this in detail in the following sections.

9 Moreover, a distinction between minority languages like Konkani and Tulu, which are endowed with a socially and economically influential community and the minor languages of most tribal groups, without such an affluent community is important here. This paper focusses on the latter as minor languages.

languages for instance), without the resources for political mobilisation has to be kept in mind as we delve into the history of this question.

The Language Question in India: A Historical Account

Lachman Khubchandani (2007) argues that postcolonial nations in South Asia have adopted a comprehensive planning that envisages ‘education for all’ and in the Indian case, it is evident from the constitutional provisions for minority languages and cultures. Yet, their colonial inheritance of the elitist approach of ‘selective education’ along with the contestations in the postcolonial polity for representation and power, made the unfolding of these provisions rather complex. (Khubchandani 370).

He maps ‘the Great Debate’ between Anglicists and Orientalists, about the prominence to be given to Indian languages in relation to English in education and culture. While Orientalists were sympathetic towards the native languages, especially, Sanskrit and Urdu, the Anglicist position, as represented in the famous Minutes on Education by Thomas Babington Macaulay of 1835, made English the primary medium of instruction, citing its superiority over the native language and literature. Subsequent colonial policies have noted that the vernaculars need to develop first to qualify as medium of instruction in education and medium of communication in administration. Gandhi has opposed this later and provided the alternative of imparting basic education in the mother tongues alone¹⁰.

In the post-independence period, Constituent Assembly debates (CAD) on the question of language took place during 12-14 September 1949 and it was revisited during the final reading of the Draft Constitution on 18 November 1949¹¹. Paramjit S Judge (2021) notes that it was one of the last questions to be debated upon as the Congress could not reach any internal consensus on the issue and it turned out to be one of the most contentious issues in the Assembly. After heated debates, it was finalised that there will not be any national language for India, only official languages including Hindi written in Devnagari script, English (on a provisional basis for fifteen years) and a number of languages spoken in various regions across, to be part of the Eighth Schedule as recognised languages for official communication. Most of the representatives were clear about the relationship between these clauses and the imminent demand for linguistic reorganisation of the territory. Hence, they were cautious as to re-

10 Khubchandani argues that in all these debates the focus was squarely on the medium of education and much less about the content to be taught. However, in the recent years, the content has become a turf of political polarisation and ideological battle, and are being proactively changed by the state.

11 All references to the CAD here, are accessible on <https://www.constitutionofindia.net/debates/10-sep-1949/>

strict the official languages to only the two former ones i.e. Hindi and English. This will further lead to the issue of choosing a language as the medium of instruction across the nation and these are interrelated issues as far as policies are concerned.

The CAD did not finalise on the issue of linguistic state reorganisation or language as the medium of instruction and these issues became pivotal in Indian politics in later decades. Yet, disproportionate stress was given to the long-term plan of making Hindi capable of becoming the official and popular language of India. More interestingly, the future of the provisional status of English as an official language became predictable according to Judge (2021) as the non-Hindi speaking regions vehemently opposed any attempt to remove English and make Hindi the sole official language. The multitude of issues that stemmed from this tussle are beyond the scope of this paper¹².

Now let us trace the origins of the official language policy in India briefly, starting from the colonial period and closely looking at the University Education Commission Report-1948-9 and mapping up to the recent National Education Policy-2020, for there is an active, at times unpredictable relationship between the implementation of these policies and the political mobilization at the grassroots.

University Education Commission Report-1948-9: The official language debate

The plan discussed in the CAD to gradually assimilate all the regions to Hindi and to make Hindi capable of integrating the major aspects of these regional languages was passionately opposed and the linguistic assertion movements proclaimed to dissociate with the approach even before the official policy was passed. Several intense and even violent episodes of protests took place across the region, making it difficult to revisit the issue of the provisional status of English as the official language.

A significant fallout of this issue was the question of education and the medium of instruction from the primary classes. The TLF prescribed by the University Education Commission in 1948 and later taken into consideration by the Nehru government identifies the ‘national language problem’ in India, in the context of deciding upon the medium of instruction in higher education. A closer reading of the Report will unravel some of the challenges faced by the nascent postcolonial nation and the rationale provided for the choice of the official language and a gesture towards the medium of instruction.

12 One of those issues are the communal interpretation of the making of the Hindi, ‘cleansed off’ its Urdu connections and the legacy of a syncretic language of the common people called Hindustani.

The Report acknowledged English to be a colonial vestige and the ‘alien tongue’; at the same time, the linguistic diversity is formidable and how to reconcile it with the larger ideal of unity was the challenge. The report notes that all the chief languages ‘having literatures of their own’ were to be worthy to become the medium of instruction in the respective regions. According to the Statistical Handbook published by the Constituent Assembly in 1947, and based on the census of 1931, there were 12 chief languages (with 4 divisions within Hindi, all seem to be inadequate as loans are significant in all four) out of which English, Hindi and Sanskrit’s statuses were primarily debated upon.

The process to develop a federal language seemed very difficult and a range of arguments were presented in favour and against each candidate. In order to become the official language of the state any individual language had to fulfil a minimum of requirements; the ability to function as the language of business (both national and international), the depth to comprehend and disseminate philosophy and science globally, and most importantly to impart the highest teaching and research in all modern academic disciplines. The Report (1948) proposed a few yardsticks for identifying and verifying the ideal language to become the official language of the Indian state. Firstly, the ability to retain its originality even while adopting from other languages or the potential for assimilation and second, organic inclusiveness towards words from European languages which cannot be purged due to peculiar historical trajectory.

As already mentioned, there were efforts to ‘purify’ Hindi of all influences other than that of Sanskrit and the Report deemed this to be a dangerous tendency as this move would amount to artificially cleanse the language of its long-standing history whereas variety is essential for natural flexibility and suppleness of the language. A problem faced by all provincial languages was that most of the technical and scientific terms were on loan and reaching an economical consensus seemed impossible due to the rivalries and competition. A common opinion among Indian educationists was to loan technical terms solely from English as it will lead to international approach in sciences.

The emphasis on the ability of the language to enable and enhance scientific education is evident in these discussions and it is unsurprising given the Nehruvian approach towards remedying the scientific backwardness ‘at the fastest pace’ by spreading the ‘international character of science’ for which, language is just like scientific symbols¹³. This is to pacify those who approach English as a colonial tool or alien language by underlining the fact that all the other European languages have also adopted English terms for scientific research. The Report revisits the Recommendations of the Central Advisory

13 This opinion is proposed by Dr Mahajani, Vice-Chancellor of the Rajputana University by pointing out Newman’s distinction between science and literature. In science, unlike in literature the language does not hold any ethical connotations, rather they are like any other symbols.

Board Committee of 1944 about higher education in sciences, which point towards a distinct possibility of using common terms in English for international purposes, alongside terms borrowed and adopted from other Indian languages.

The advocates of English argued that it could be a platform for unity, nationalism, national sentiments as modern civilization was brought to the sub-continent in English and it is also medium of international relations owing to its growing status as an international language. Others retorted that it would be a negation of the nascent democracy and it would divide the nation into two entities namely the rulers and the ruled. Also, as the primary medium of instruction, English would create conflicts in the mind of the future learner between the ordinariness of the mother tongue and complexity of learning school subjects in English. “The nation will develop and split consciousness – “the Babu mind””, according to Dr Hans, Lecturer in Comparative Education in the London University (Report: 276-7).

The other aspect of the discourse focussed on Sanskrit as the utmost refined classical language of ancient India. Though the historical and ideological force of Sanskrit was evident from its resurgence during the freedom movement, it was agreed upon by most that it would not enable an easy and efficient spread of the sciences and it might not be beneficial for the new generation to converse in the international realm and hence not suited to become the official language. It is important to note the word of caution presented by the members of the Commission against the ‘revivalist’ tendencies among some groups, with regard to Sanskrit.

We must also beware of revivalist ideology. Recovery of antique virtue or antique culture is not in accord with the laws of history. Sir Walter Moberly who was for many years chairman of Universities Grants Commission of Great Britain says in his challenging book *The Crisis in the University*, “archaism is impracticable; what is revived is never more, than a simulacrum. It is also undesirable, since the past always has grave faults, the revival of which would be unpardonable. (Report: 272)

Thus, it was finalised that a version of the Hindi/Hindustani/Khari Boli was the only option for the official language of the nation as it was spoken by the greatest number of Indians, and it was argued that ‘[w]hen Hindi assimilates terms in popular usage and adopts scientific and technical terms which are used internationally it will grow richer and fuller than it is today’ (Report: 278).

It is important to keep in mind that a different notion of Indian nation was still alive at this point, a federation with equal units and this decision by the University Education Commission, 1948-9 would mean that these federating units would have to learn Hindi to participate in the official life of the Federation. This way, the native speakers of Hindi would invariably have immense advantage over the citizens from non-Hindi speaking provinces as the

access to resources invariably would depend on the quality of political communication between the government and the people.

The Report includes a few pointers towards the selection of official language in federal units/provinces for official communication and education. It ought to be a language that will satisfy the two requirements that of ‘federal unity and local variety’ (Report: 279). Hindi shall not overpower regional languages as it would compromise the linguistic and cultural diversity of the land. This is the ideational point of origin of the TLF that could resolve this conundrum, according to the Commission. The first two languages across the nation will be English and the respective mother tongues and, in the Hindi-speaking regions, another Indian language could be the third language and for non-Hindi regions, Hindi will be the third language. We can recover a sense of urgency to move beyond English in the Report, to replace it with a federal language. Yet, it also realises, within the spirit of the times, the ethical and practical issues related to imposing Hindi across the territory. However, as we already pointed out the expectation was that ‘ultimately English will disappear from the scene as the language of the State, Central or Provincial’ through a planned, stage-wise approach of the federal government (Report 283). Now let’s narrow the discussion down to the three-language formula in detail, focussing on the conflicted terrain of language as a medium of instruction.

Language as the Medium of Instruction: Political Life of the Three-Language Formula

Though the Three-Language Formula was introduced in the Report as early as in 1949, owing to the protests on the question of the official language it was not implemented until the later 1960s. In this section, we will look at the life of the three-language formula in India, as an attempt to solve the question of which language should function as the medium of instruction. We will try to trace the impact and political repercussions of the implementation of the policy, with a special focus on the southern states, as the policy had the most sweeping effects on their education systems.

The subsequent National Education Commission, popularly known as the Kothari Commission was set up in 1964 and it submitted its report in 1966. The Commission made several recommendations towards the standardisation of basic education in India starting from the pre-primary stages up to the twelfth standard. The Commission recommended a revised version of the three-language policy, which assumed that the languages recognised in the Eighth Schedule are equivalent to mother tongues. The TLF was only a strategy and not a national language policy until it was adopted by the Indian parliament in 1968 and the National Education Policy of the government carried it as

“Hindi, English and [a] modern Indian language (preferably one of the southern languages) in the Hindi speaking states and Hindi, English and the Regional language in the non-Hindi speaking States” (NEP1968).

The TLF mandated that a pupil needs to have ‘sufficient control over three languages’ by the completion of lower secondary stage as a minimum requirement of languages in school education. Mother tongue, English and a non-native modern Indian language became part of the curriculum across the country. Currently, India has eighty languages as medium of instruction at different levels of education. TLF has been the official policy on role of languages in education even before its official implementation in 1968. It envisaged the regional language or mother tongue as the first teaching language for the first five years, Hindi in non-Hindi areas and any other Indian language in Hindi areas as the second language for three years (6-8th grade) and finally, English as the third language from the 3rd year onwards.

There are several confusions that spilt out of this formula and some of those are as follows: there was a clear discrepancy in understanding the relationship between the regional language and mother tongue in most regions as this easily led to the imposition of majority languages on marginalised groups, especially tribals. Second, this was applicable only in government sponsored education and the private educational systems could follow any combination that they prefer. This problem is manifold today, with the massive private investment in education and the ‘stress on international benchmarking’ in the NEP-2020. Even when the TLF was modified in 1964 by the Kothari Commission, these confusions continued but, a provision was added for the transitional multi-lingual education for tribal groups. Eventually, majority language in each region became the first language, English as the most common second language and Hindi or Sanskrit as third language. The National Education Policy of 1986 largely continued the language related provisions given in 1968.

The National Focus Group on Teaching of Indian Languages (NFGTIL) constituted under the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in their Position Paper submitted in 2006 points out that TLF has been ‘observed more in the breach than in the observance’ meaning, the Hindi-speaking states have largely adopted Sanskrit as the third language, apart from Hindi and English, instead of a southern language whereas the many non-Hindi-speaking states, such as Orissa, Kerala, West Bengal, and Maharashtra among others implemented the formula in letter and spirit. However, Tamil Nadu devised a two-language formula by including only Tamil and English in its curricula, as it argued that the Hindi-speaking states are bypassing the spirit of the formula by using Sanskrit, which can be written in the same script as Hindi and will not be tested for its spoken abilities (NFGTIL 2006).

As mentioned above, the TLF has seen vastly varied interpretations and implementations across India. A minor language shall be taught in the primary

schools where at least 10% population speaks the language and it shall be alongside a dual medium of instruction in the regional language and in the minor one. The governments were supposed to provide special teachers for these languages specially for areas where the speakers are below 10% and there is research that shows the partial or inadequate implementation of this provision. The medium of instruction is unclear in many regions as the institutional systems do not support multilingualism. It promotes casual assimilation and many tribal groups in India, face the eventual loss of mother tongues. Moreover, most children from the marginalised rural backgrounds from the non-Tribal regions, will end up following a four-language formula as their mother tongue, as spoken at home is distinct from their regional language. It has been argued that the TLF has been a failure in addressing major issues in multilingual education because it has been mostly done on political whims, under pressure from popular protests and vote-bank motives, without thorough research and theoretical frameworks even after five decades separating between the initial formula and the current policy.

However, Harold Schiffman presents a different take on the trajectory of TLF. He identifies four unique features of India's linguistic culture namely, antiquity, ubiquity (the pervasiveness of Indian linguistic cultural norms), orality (elaboration of complicated methods of oral transmission of language) and diversity (1996: 170). In such a context, language policies exist in either explicit or implicit domains and the abolition of 'the explicit rules about language, or declaring "standard" languages to be nothing but a "myth" or an ideology does not make the cultural assumptions underlying these concepts automatically disappear' according to Schiffman (1996: 148). He also points toward the attempt in the 1950s to imitate the language policy of the USSR, simply by installing Hindi in the place of Russian. Schiffman argues that the TLF, which replaced this Hindi-centric approach 'recognizes the historical multilingualism, the linguistic diversity, and the reverence for ancient classical languages is more likely to succeed than an imported model of any sort' (1996: 168). According to him, even the failure of the TLF is 'a negotiated outcome, a middle way between unfettered diversity and monolingualism'. Its success lies in its ability to allow different interpretations of the policy, depending on local sentiments and needs and goes on to state that '[I]n fact, if left to their own devices, many Indians will learn more than three languages, and expect the same of their children, and their children's children' (1996: 172).

Regional Political Mobilisations on Language (TLF)

The protests around the linguistic reorganisation of Indian territory goes back to the early 1950s which led to several instances of violence and militant assertion. This eventually led to the States Reorganisation Act, 1956 that

recurred the boundaries of the units of Indian polity, namely the states along linguistic lines. Before going into the mobilisations after the TLF, it is imperative to briefly layout the map of such efforts for the formation of the language-states as a precursor to the former. As we know, the partition of India in 1947 unleashed violence of unprecedented proportions in modern Indian history and this in turn caused uncertainty among the political elites and masses alike. The former had to resort to more conservative political strategies in order to avoid any further fissures in the national body and this made them overtly cautious about the claims of language-based units in the post-colonial phase. The first of those protests took place in the Telugu-speaking regions of the Madras State and the State of Andhra was formed three years prior to the Act of 1956. Later, several such assertions took place in various parts, including for the formation of Maharashtra, with Bombay as its capital.

The political assertions against the language policy in education can be understood as the second wave of mobilisation flaming out of linguistic aspirations. As a response to the TLF, the DMK (*Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam*) leader and then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, CN Annadurai provocatively said during the mobilisations of 1967-69 that '[I]f we had to accept the principle of numerical superiority while selecting our national bird, the choice would have fallen not on the peacock but on the common crow. Why should we then claim the tiger as our national animal instead of the rat which is so much more numerous?' He argued that if English is capable of linking the region with the rest of the world, it ought to be sufficient in linking the region with the rest of the country as English is an essential part of education across the land. In a humour so characteristic of his political speeches, he went onto say that '[T]o plead for two link languages is like boring a smaller hole in a wall for the kitten while there is a bigger one for the cat. What suits the cat will suit the kitten as well' (Ramakrishnan, 2019). He was willing to give the formula a chance in his state, only if all other states were following it too. The DMK mobilised people against the formula arguing that any government-sanctioned requirement for higher studies or employment, to study Hindi at school would disadvantage the Tamil-speakers as Tamil and Hindi were completely dissimilar languages in terms of grammar, structure, script and history. It was argued that any compulsion to learn and practise Hindi would give an unfair advantage for Hindi-speakers. These protests around mid-1960s were one of the reasons why the Centre rescinded on its earlier decision to replace English completely with Hindi. The two-language policy of the DMK government in 1968 has been discussed above as an example of how the TLF had been 'honoured more by breach rather than by abidance' (Schiffman, 170).

The recent revival of the TLF under the NEP-2020 stirred some responses from the regional parties, like DMK and their regional rival AIADMK. Edappadi K Palaniswami, who was the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu at the time of its

introduction, termed it as ‘painful and saddening’, as he vowed not to implement the new policy in the state. Mr Palaniswami listed the consistent stands on the issue taken by late Chief Ministers Anna Durai, MG Ramachandran and Jayalalithaa against the imposition of Hindi and urged Prime Minister Modi to ‘reconsider’ the three-language policy (Jesudasan, 2020). It is amply clear that such assertions give rise to negotiable policy dimensions and these dominant language subjects in India have been the beneficiaries of such explicit and implicit negotiations.

The Absent Minors: Political Mobilization and Electoral Bargaining

The Report of the University Education Commission had cautioned the government about the ‘pockets of minorities’ spread across the nation, who would benefit from a primary education with their mother tongue as the medium of instruction. They could be introduced to the respective dominant regional language ‘if the numbers are adequate’ at secondary and university levels. The pervasive lack of interest shown by the juggernaut of governance to these ‘pockets’ from the early decades of the ‘nation building’ has been studied by various scholars in terms of industrial, infrastructural and development policies cutting across ministries and departments. Still, the fragmented histories of the tribal and other severely marginalised communities are yet to be fully recognised and unearthed by the Indian academia. Here, we will look at their absence from any of the political bargains and decision-making platforms as heated struggles for language took place across the nation.

It can be inferred from the discussion in the chapter that the lack of such organised assertions, of linguistic identity and its political prowess, has led to the marginalisation and invisibilisation of several languages from the rich linguistic map of India. In an interview given by Ajit K Mohanty, an established scholar of the social, educational, and cognitive implications of bilingualism among linguistic minorities, within the context of Indian multilingualism, he points out that there are around 500-600 tribal mother tongues in India out of which only two have been recognised in the Eighth Schedule, namely Bodo and Santhali (both in 2004). Moreover, only 3-4 of these languages are being used as medium of instruction in schools (Pattnaik, 2005). This unpacks the picture of the marginalisation of minor languages in India vis-à-vis the institutions and process of education and development.

Cynthia Groff (2017) argues that the national-level language and language-in-education planning in India, through its insensitive process of recognition, classification and rationalisation, fails to legitimise the majority of the minor languages. She emphasises on the need to ‘acknowledge the pluralistic

language practices that defy linguistic categorization' as in the long run any attempts at rigid classification would only help the dominant languages and it will in turn reduce the linguistic varieties and cultural diversities (Groff: 157)

Vaidehi Ramanathan (2005, 2007) in her path-breaking work brings back the question of class into the language classrooms of India and argue that English cannot simply be seen as a colonial tongue, as the proactive engagement of people from various social strata, economic classes and regions in India have resulted in centuries of adaptation and decolonisation of English. It has become 'hybridised, nativized and decolonised in many respects', while continuing to provide access to power and dominance in a deeply divided society like India. Even in the case of the multilingual education provided to minority students, especially tribal children, English still works as the most important resource that could afford the students with socio-economic mobility. Moreover, most efforts of multilingual education programs are still in the nascent stage in India.

In the final section, we will point towards the two languages, Bodo and Santhali with regard to their journey into the Eighth Schedule as examples of a paving a way forward for other minor languages. Before that we will briefly analyse the National Education Policy introduced in 2020, for its interpretation of the TLF, focussing on the content of the policy, as separate from its political ramification spelt out in the earlier section.

NEP-2020: Challenges and Possibilities

We have already seen how the National Policy on Education-1968, and its subsequent iterations in 1986, and 1992 have been more or less similar in their agendas and methods of implementation. NEP 2020 claims to promote multilingualism in India by harnessing the power of language in teaching and learning for individual and collective development. Scholars have argued that this could possibly ensue a 'democratic reform' by openly discussing multilingualism in India for the first time. It is also considered as consistent with mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB MLE) models that have gained currency across the world in the recent years.

In brief the provisions in NEP-2020 with regard to the medium of instruction (MoI) are as follows: the MoI is to be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond and thereafter, the home/local language is to be taught as a language wherever possible. A bilingual approach is to be adopted by teachers using 'bilingual teaching-learning materials' especially in cases where a discrepancy exists between the home language of the students and the dominant MoI. It is expected that this will provide 'greater flexibility' to the TLF, and no language will be imposed on any state. As long as at least two of the three languages are native to India, the specific choices can be made by the students in accordance

with the larger choices of the states. An important provision in the NEP-2020 is the prominence given to Sanskrit, which is identified as the repository of something known as ‘Sanskrit Knowledge Systems’ comprised of ancient knowledge of the sciences, arts, philosophies and spirituality, of multi-religious and secular authors.

Mahapatra and Anderson (2023) points out that the NEP documents lack clarity in terminology like mother tongue, local language and/or home language and certain ambiguities in the policy makes the scholars doubt its potential beyond the rhetoric. They argue that the policy lacks a viable plan thus making the Language, Policy and Planning (LPP), a universal requirement of modern states non-existent in the case of India. According to them, the policy seems to sideline the pertinent questions about the specific methods and timeline for the execution of the policy.

There exists a huge gulf between the state level implementations of language policy and national level policy itself across Indian states and a number of infrastructural and practical problems like the lack of availability of well-trained teachers make it impossible to create any changes in the positive direction despite the policy guidelines. A report published by a fact-finding team of journalists in a number of tribal schools in the state of Andhra Pradesh, conducted in August 2023, three years since the introduction of the NEP-2020 opines that the tribal students experience a ‘dissonance’ between their lives at home/ in community and attending school, which in turn lead to slow learning, class repetition, and eventual dropouts. This perpetuates and intensifies the ‘structural invisibility of Adivasi students’ and the total destruction of their invaluable knowledge systems. This resonates with the scholarly explorations in the space occupied by tribal students in other parts of India. (Mohanty & Saikia 2004, Groff 2016, Nag 2018)

The study unearths a letter from the Director of Tribal Welfare Department, AP to the office of the AP *Samagra Shiksha* program, dated 7 July 2023, which states that 1454 schools are implementing the MTB-MLE program in seven tribal languages across 11 districts. It can be noted that the Department of Tribal Welfare does not recognise the payments given to the volunteers of the MTB-MLE scheme as salaries in the official documents; instead, they are noted as honorariums, which makes their job insecure without any pension scheme, PF or insurance facilities (Pangi et al. 2023). Most of these volunteers are also drawn from these tribal communities to function as intermediaries between the dominant language and the home language of the students and this exposes the vicious cycle of exploitation and lack of planning in the policy.

Dhir Jhingran, a retired bureaucrat and expert in language policy argues that the formula was ‘almost shelved in practice’ and the NEP-2020 revives it along with stipulating the introduction of all three languages in the early years and ensuring speaking proficiency and reading ability in all three by grade 3. This

has been pointed out as a distinguishing aspect of the TLF in the NEP-2020. He goes on to argue that the Draft makes no distinction between 'language acquiring skills' and 'language learning skills' of children at an early age. Children living in multilingual socio-cultural contexts observably showcase the former skills, while the latter, which focusses on learning scripts and formal structures of a language, depends on the formal training imparted at school. This will place 'a very heavy cognitive burden on a young child of five to seven years' according to him and this burden will be experienced disproportionately by children from marginalised sections, with no additional support from their mostly uneducated families (Dasgupta 2019).

Way Forward: Substantive Political Participation from the Margins

Ajit K Mohanty in his seminal work on multilingual education in India argues that through the implementation of the TLF, a hierarchical progression from the mother tongue to regional and then national level languages is accepted as a goal of education. But its practice is enmeshed with the power-structures at different levels as to which language gains prominence at what level and which language is employed for what functions. He elaborated the organic life of a language using an 'ecology metaphor' whereby languages evolve in particular environments and become endangered and even extinct under changes to that environment (2019). The 'double divide' in the history of language politics in India – between the language of the elites in power and that of the masses on the one hand and the language of the masses and that of the marginalised on the other necessitates multi-pronged approach as opposed to a top to bottom one.

Drawing from their research among the Kond tribal group with the language Kui in Orissa, Mohanty and his fellow researchers have shown that the tribals themselves are aware of the lack of social mobility and resources associated with their linguistic identity and struggle to access the same through public education in Oriya, the dominant state-language. He suggests a few strategies to overcome the tensions, conflicts and uncertainties that underlie the language paradigm in India, primarily drawing from the recent examples of Bodo, the language of the Bodo tribe in Assam and Santhali, the language of the Santhal tribe in West Bengal, both gained constitutional recognition in the Eighth Schedule in 2003. These two tribes and the speakers of Dogri and Maithili (the minority languages in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir and the state of Bihar, respectively) have a long history of political struggle that led to their recognition. These struggles vary from each other in their modes of assertion and nature of the demands raised vis-à-vis the state and the Centre. Especially

in their study among the Bodo tribe, after the recognition and education made possible in the mother tongue, they have identified various positive benefits among the children, starting from a meaningful identity formation as students and sense of closeness to the curriculum (Mohanty 2006: 271).

An equity-oriented implementation of multilingualism in India necessitates substantive political participation from the grassroots. This will enable us to move away from approaching the language as a problem to a paradigm where language is seen as a resource in India. (Mohanty 165-174). Shivani Nag (2018) has examined the linguistic alienation of those who did not have their mother tongues as medium of instruction and their consequent disempowerment in higher education, based on her research on multilingual education models implemented in Orissa. Tollefson (2008) in his seminal work on language planning in education provides us some pointers to the future of our discourse. The human rights approach to language rights seems insufficient especially in the era of complete commercialisation of education and the role of the language policy as an ‘apparatus of governmentality’ and its subversive relation to ‘social change and critical pedagogy’ should be acknowledged by the academicians. This will be possible only by addressing the theoretical questions around power, inequality and ideology embedded in any language policy.

Mahapatra and Anderson focus on the need for the linguistically inclusive ‘Languages for Learning’ (LFL) framework as an alternative to the MoI framework that they deem as ‘outdated and reductive’ (2023: 109). Without going into the details of this framework we could summarise that it would be ‘structurally flexible, socio-culturally feasible, economically viable and academically relevant’ (102). It will focus on equity, inclusivity and cognitive independence along with other focal points. They argue that more fundamental research needs to be done, moving away from the Western models of education reform, fitting for the South Asian experience. This is possible only if the long-term aim is democratisation of education through sensitive use of language rather than the straight jacket approach that might be convenient for governance. They also raise an argument pertinent to our discussion that the relation between research in language and other social sciences like political theory and sociology needs to be strengthened.

Conclusion

The chapter attempted to bring together the questions of language policy, political assertion culminating in community-formation, access to resources and the democratisation of education framed by inclusion and equity in the Indian scenario. It is argued that for such an exploration, it is significant to contextualise the research in language policy and education in the discourses of political theory using the concepts of justice, freedom, and democracy.

On the one hand, the minor language groups have to struggle for the official recognition within the multilingual constitutional framework of India, but on the other, the governmental classifications further minimize their possibility of independent development as a conceptual and communicative resource of the community. Will Kymlicka (2001) argues for a ‘politics in vernacular’ as the most effective way towards the formation of a ‘demos’, a political community that can give substance to the slogan of ‘unity in diversity’ in the multicultural context of India. Hence, the language-politics matrix explored in the chapter points at a complex layer in the discourse on Indian multiculturalism that complicates not only the policy paradigms of language, but also the nature of the conception of the political community that emanates out of identity-assertions in the postcolonial theoretical practices.

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Chapter 9

Multiculturalism Institutionalised: Perspectives on Article 30 of the Indian Constitution

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Abstract

Multiculturalism acknowledges cultural diversity and difference and provides for institutional and at times, Constitutional accommodation of this diversity and difference. However, this process is not devoid of challenges. India has been one of the few countries that have sought to accommodate cultural pluralism in both the Constitution and its institutions. More so, this accommodation has been facilitated by granting fundamental rights. One such set of rights are the Cultural and Educational Rights embodied in Articles 29 and 30 of the Indian Constitution. This paper seeks to highlight multicultural accommodation in India through the lens of these cultural and educational rights, Article 30 in particular. In doing so, the paper attempts to bring out the contestations that arise in the exercise of these rights.

Introduction

In October 2023, the Press reported objections by the UP (Uttar Pradesh) Madarsa Board of undue interference amounting to the nature of 'illegal' notices being served by the Basic Education Department of the State Government of Uttar Pradesh to madaras in the state (TOI, 2023)¹⁴. For the uninitiated, madaras are centres of traditional learning for members of the Muslim community. They engage mostly in religious education/instruction but also impart

¹⁴ <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2023/Oct/25/unregistered-madaras-in-uttar-pradesh-to-be-penalised-rs-10000-per-day-2626941.html>

education in subjects like mathematics, science and social sciences. However, the said State government appointed Special Investigation Teams to carry out the task and the outcome of these surveys is not shared with the Madarsas. Ifthikar Ahmed Javed, Chairperson, UP Board of Madarsa Education said these probes, surveys and investigations appear arbitrary since the outcomes are left ambiguous.

In the same month, the Karnataka High Court dismissed the appeal of the Rajarajeshwari Dental College and hospital seeking autonomy to employ and dismiss workers as they are an unaided linguistic minority educational institution. Based on this, the Court upheld the right of the employee - dismissed in July 2021 - security of tenure in the College.

Another set of articles covered reports on the National Commission of Minority Educational Institutions (NCMEI). As a body committed to upholding the Constitutional right of minorities, the NCMEI has been known to have an underrepresented team membership, with currently only one member out of the mandated four in the Commission. This goes to demonstrate that not all communities are represented in the Commission. Nevertheless, it has not deterred the Commission from directing states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telengana & Andhra Pradesh, which threatened withdrawal of minority status certificates if the respective educational institutions did not admit students of their community up to a percentage decided by the states i.e. 50, 30, and 25 per cent by Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh & Telengana and Karnataka, respectively, to revoke their Order. The setting of a limit is not new and was decided by the Supreme Court in one of its cases.

The above cases are by way of illustrating the nuances of institutionalizing multiculturalism in India. Indian society has been home to numerous religions, cultures, tribes and languages. Despite a majority Hindu population, its history has witnessed the advent of different cultures and syncretic traditions. Religions were born of a critique of hegemonic cultures and gained roots in the territory that is today considered India. The term 'multicultural' therefore can be used to describe India much before its inception in the 20th century. It does, however, become crucial to interrogate this multi-cultural dimension within India as the diversity has resulted in a somewhat chequered history. The character of the sovereign state of India and its Constitution has been mindful of this tumultuous history. This essay seeks to investigate the multicultural dimension in a select provision of the Indian Constitution i.e. cultural and educational rights (given to religious and linguistic minorities). This is reflective of what Will Kymlicka years later defended as a liberal theory of minority rights.

Examining institutionalised multiculturalism in India presents two challenges. One, much of the literature on multiculturalism in the west has been accommodated by the Indian state within the discourse of secularism. Therefore, theorists have actually had to articulate the multicultural discourse in India as

opposed to having the same as a ready reference. The second is the multiple sources from where institutionalised multiculturalism poses a challenge.

This essay is structured as follows: part one would examine the theoretical underpinnings of multiculturalism and attempt to establish the case of India that comes closest to it. Part two would summarize some key points that emerged in the articulation of cultural diversity in India in the course of drafting the Constitution. The third and final part would look at select instances of minority rights through the prism of Article 30 to demonstrate the challenges of institutionalized multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism – theoretical considerations

Political theory and thought have over the years addressed questions of understanding and organising society, avoiding conflicts, seeking means of peace and accommodation and acknowledging the centrality of rights and duties to citizens and members of the republic or body politic. Needless to say that at different periods of history in both the western and non-western world, frameworks have been developed to respond to these questions. In contemporary times, in particular the 20th century, multiculturalism has emerged as a theoretical paradigm to understand and conceptualise cultural diversity. Theorists writing on issues falling within the ambit of multiculturalism have attempted to establish the importance of cultural embeddedness of individuals within the dominant 20th century liberal paradigm. Within disciplinary confines, literature on multiculturalism has contested and coexisted with the dominant liberal understanding of state, market and society. Practically, multiculturalism has been ‘institutionalised’ by its incorporation as diversity friendly policy, legislation, institutions, constitution and rights.

This essay is an exercise at investigating institutionalised multiculturalism in India through the prism of cultural and educational rights. At the outset, the essay lays out certain thematic engagements of multiculturalism available in existing literature. Multiculturalism as a theory and practice emerged in the mid-20th century to address growing concerns of recognition and accommodation raised in parts of Europe and North America. Canada stands out as one of the states to officially embrace multiculturalism. Others such as India embraced diversity in their Constitution; what later came to be called multiculturalism in the West. Multiculturalism emerged not only to address questions of diversity, individual autonomy and cultural embeddedness, but also has increasingly been tasked with looking at inequalities, discrimination and social justice arising from cultural diversity. The Indian case is distinctive as questions of discrimination and social justice were addressed at the time of Constitution making. This was also preceded by legislations and initiatives when India was a colony of the British. Thus, while not advocating multiculturalism per se, the Indian leaders

drafted a Constitution that, in the context of religious and cultural diversity spoke of secularism.

This section briefly discusses some of the popular theorists on multiculturalism. The list is exhaustive and the attempt here is to broadly map literature on the theme. To begin with, a note on a theorist that addresses the quintessential individual-community dichotomy confronting culturally diverse societies – Will Kymlicka. Kymlicka argues for a theory of group differentiated minority rights. His vision is both liberal and multicultural at the same time as he recognizes the need for individual autonomy particularly with respect to choosing conceptions of good. Individuals however, have to be responsible for these choices and the State in this context provides external conditions for the enjoyment of individual autonomy and exercise of choice. (Kymlicka, 2017: 1) The State, according to him, ought to play a significant role in its claims to legitimacy based on popular sovereignty. States often claim sovereignty over minorities and it is here that its legitimacy and procedure need to be interrogated. Often, popular sovereignty is linked to ideas of nationhood that are upheld and reinforced through national media, national symbols and holidays, a national language. It is the responsibility of the state thus, to build the same among minorities, through mechanisms of territorial autonomy, representation, indigenous rights and inclusion (not assimilation) of immigrants. (Kymlicka, 2017: 7-8)

Kukathas would extend this position on liberal multiculturalism claiming that it attempts to find a mid-way between isolationism and assimilation. While cultural diversity is bound to result in some imitation and voluntary assimilation, the state has to exercise toleration that according to Kukathas is a form of ‘weak multiculturalism’. This weak multiculturalism he locates in classical liberal multiculturalism. (Kukathas: 14) Kukathas’s enquiry is more philosophical than it is practical and policy oriented. While subscribing to the view that tolerance within the classical liberal framework is what provides for the theoretical foundations of multiculturalism, he admits to the limitations of such a perfect idea of society that “no regime may be willing, or able to reach”. (Kukathas: 21) Nevertheless, as a philosophical premise and as a means of accommodation than suppression of cultural diversity, classical liberal multiculturalism has much to offer in terms of an “open society”. (Ibidem)

As stated before, in contemporary politics, multiculturalism has come to be identified with questions of social justice. This in particular is to do with challenges faced in the course of multicultural education. As Alismail argues, multicultural education not only aims at accommodation and inclusion but of providing fair education to students with the purpose of achieving social justice. (Alismail, 2016: 139) In the USA multicultural education emerged in the 1960s – 1980s as a response to the demands of the civil rights movement and a means for African Americans and other “unmeltable ethnics to become a part of the American melting pot”. (Ibidem: 140) It implied that educational

institutions had to reflect the cultural diversity in its staff, values, curriculum and student body.

Lastly, Bhikhu Parekh in his essay 'Political theory and the multicultural society' would present a case for multiculturalism as managing cultural diversity in modern societies. The coexistence and plurality is not necessarily seamless as a common culture is one that includes distinctions at individual and group levels. Hence, there is a 'subcultural diversity' that Parekh speaks of. (Parekh, 1999: 1) Moreover, modern societies are constituted by organised and self-aware cultural communities that live or would like to live within their different and distinct systems of beliefs and practices. Some of these would also be critical of the dominant culture and may seek to reconstitute the values of the dominant culture. In the 1960s, multiculturalism emerged in this backdrop, articulating collective rights and the cultural embeddedness of individuals. Gradually, multiculturalism came to assist immigrants and ethnic minorities in their quest for cultural recognition, autonomy in cultural practices and equal respect. Parekh draws our attention to issues within political theory with regard to theorising multiculturalism including the possibility of a cultural bias of those writing about cultural diversity. The challenge for a multicultural society, however, is to evolve a conceptual framework that would rise above the liberal/non liberal divide and counter the 'absolute liberalism' of the West that imposes a cultural monopoly on otherwise diverse societies. (Parekh, 1999: 31-32)

Given the above, the case of pluralism and diversity in India comes closest to the literature on multicultural education and the quest for sub cultural diversity. We will see in the following pages, how Article 30 of the Indian education has incorporated facets of multicultural education i.e. student body, staff and curriculum and how some of these aspects are challenged by the State. Examining multiculturalism in India also presents and complicates the absolute liberal paradigm and demonstrates that a middle path has to be found i.e. liberal values and cultural claims have to, in the end, coexist and address claims to social justice. This discourse is still in the making with respect to minority educational institutions in India. However, it does serve as a roadmap for identifying contemporary shifts in multicultural theory and practice i.e. from accommodation to an assertion of claims.

India: Cultural Pluralism & the Legal Framework

Some theorists have argued that mere cultural pluralism does not amount to multiculturalism (Mahajan). Often most societies are culturally plural i.e. they are constituted by more than two cultures. However, in many of these societies, the dominant culture tends to subsume smaller cultures thereby presenting a more homogenous than heterogeneous character. However, since this homogeneity was neither imposed nor coercive, it received little critical attention. Pluralism,

once it became a basis for claiming rights from the state, served as a contested site. This is the scenario that presented itself to the people of colonial India in the early decades of the 20th century. Due to specific social contexts existing in Indian society, encouraged and ‘capitalised’ by the colonial state apparatus, cultural concerns in India seemed to centre on religious issues. Concerns for minority groups ascertained by leaders like Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru took on the colour of safeguards and protection rather than promotion of and upholding cultural diversity. Even debates, disagreements and contestations on tribal and caste identities appeared to imbibe the religious angle eventually. These were bound to reflect as they did, in Constitution making. A reading of the Constituent Assembly debates would suggest that secularism emerged as a primary concern for many members when discussing rights relating to religious freedom and rights of minorities. This however did not imply that secularism was readily accepted as a state creed. There were enumerable apprehensions regarding the use and the inclusion of the term in the Constitution. Shefali Jha draws our attention to one key instance i.e. the debates and discussion that ensued on the inclusion of the term ‘secular’ in the Preamble to the Indian Constitution. It emerged partially by the amendments moved by H.V. Kamath, Shibban Lal Saksena and Pandit Govind Malaviya on starting the Preamble with the words ‘In the name of god’, a point H.N. Kunzru and Rajendra Prasad took objection to. To the former this statement implied the invocation of a narrow, sectarian spirit and for the latter; it violated the religious freedom guaranteed in the Constitution. (Jha, 2002) While H.V. Kamath’s amendment stood defeated, the suggestion by some members to include the term secular in the Preamble received no support either and the Preamble that came into being did not include the term secular (included later, in 1976 by the 42nd amendment).

Jha identifies at least three positions on secularism that emerged from the debates in the Constituent Assembly, two of which are significant to this essay. The first position i.e. those that saw religion and state as distinct categories and therefore aligned itself more to a liberal understanding of religion i.e. giving preference to individual freedom, choice and autonomy. In what Jha terms as the ‘no concern theory’ religion came to be associated as an ‘individual’s private affair’. (Jha, 2002)¹⁵. Another position that emerged was the ‘equal respect theory’ which sought to underpin the cultural significance of religion to an individual’s life and hence suggested that the state approach all religions equally, treating them with equal respect, instead of separating itself from religion. This position is significant as it indicated a search for an ‘Indian secularism’ and was upheld by L.K. Maitra and K.M. Munshi, with the latter cautioning

15 This view of secularism followed the dominant western idea of secularism clearly separating religion and state. The precedence to the individual citizen was upheld by members like K.T. Shah, G.B. Pant and Tajamul Husain.

the members on the use of the United States non-establishment clause to the Indian Constitution (Ibidem).

The summary above of the debates in the Constituent Assembly are of significance to this essay as these debates reflected and influenced the attitudes of the members on provisions under investigation in this article i.e. cultural and educational rights. The unique juxtaposition that the Indian case presents between a multicultural society and a liberal state is a point that our legislations, judgements and institutions have had to address since independence. In the above case discussions on recognizing religious and linguistic minorities as groups eligible for cultural rights came to be questioned by Jayaprakash Narayan who advocated that “secularization of general education... was necessary for the growth of a national outlook and unity” and hence, cultural and educational rights should be confined to linguistic minorities alone. This view found supporters in Damodar Swarup Seth, G.B Pant and none other than Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, a member of the Sikh minority community. Pant argued that cultural and educational rights may be inserted in the non-justiciable part of the Constitution. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was not in favour of the establishment of minority educational institutions nor state aid to such institutions (Jha, 2002)

Ambedkar’s interventions in one way reinforced the centrality of the discourse on religion in the Constituent Assembly. On the other hand, he drew attention to the underrepresentation of social groups governed by caste identities (even though the discrimination they were subject to was legitimized by a religious code) and hence introduced an element of the ‘multi’ cultural in India. While he spoke much on minorities, he held that social discrimination constituted the real test for determining whether a social group is a minority or not and hence not just certain religious groups minorities but also scheduled castes constituted the ‘minority’ in India. (Jha, 2002: 3179)

It is here that Bajpai’s work is significant as she argues on how diversity was negotiated in *‘Debating Difference’* (Bajpai, 2015). Her narrative seeks to interpret the otherwise dominant secular-religious discourse on the debates in the Constituent Assembly and the nature of the Indian state within a multicultural framework. She begins by establishing that India, on account of its legal pluralism in family law, territorial autonomy for tribal groups, quotas in public education and offices, serves as an exemplary case for multiculturalism. However, at its inception the Indian state enacting a Constitution amidst partition and a tumultuous dawning of freedom “cut back” on its multicultural policies, hence, cultural difference and claims of minority groups arising thereof received little or no “normative support” unlike claims based on backwardness (and its elimination) that formed a part of the long-term vision of the Constitution (Bajpai, 2015: 2). She argues, as have scholars before her, that Constitutional discourse was addressing group differentiated rights as a continuation of colonial policy whereby, the British, the Princely states and nationalists, with

distinctively different intentions, had sought 'special representation' in public offices for tribal groups, Muslims, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians and Depressed Classes. These were facilitated through mechanisms of separate electorates (a contested site), reserved seats and nominations (Bajpai, 2015: 3). The indicator for defining a minority became the 'backwardness' of a community. Subsequently, affirmative action served as a temporary guarantee to address the 'backwardness' of caste groups and political reservations for religious groups was dispensed with. The shift had been made to a discourse that diluted recognition and accommodation of culturally diverse groups, a characteristic feature of multiculturalism. Bajpai observes that these quotas were offered as temporary affirmative action provisions and not as a multicultural right. (Bajpai, 2015: 6) To sum up then, the period of Constitution making and after were channelled in protecting two, diverse sets of values – liberal values of individual rights and equal citizenship and concerns of political unity and social cohesion.

To conclude this section, one can examine select arguments put forward by Constituent Assembly members in drafting Article 23, now incorporated as Article 30. Discussions in the Assembly have to be located in the colonial context of religious neutrality by the British and the existence of traditional educational institutions engaged in religious instruction and general education. The Woods Despatch for instance would recognize many of these private educational institutions and extend grant in aid to all provided they taught secular education, regardless of their religious objectives. Neutrality of the colonial state was demonstrated by the availability of grants to all and the non interference of the British in the administration and management of these institutions. This in a way set a precedent of 'state recognition' and 'state aid' to educational institutions that were community led. Another set of regulations or provisions that were in order resulted from the recommendations of the Indian Education Commission of 1882 that sought to introduce a 'conscience clause' in aided educational institutions engaged in religious instructions. While this was not adopted by the British government some places like the United Provinces, and later Madras state and Travancore incorporated versions of this clause, the primary motive being to forbid compulsory religious instruction in denominational schools.

Thus, when the Constituted Assembly commenced its work at the end of 1946, there was a ready template, a short history of traditional and denominational educational institutions and a system of government grants in place that independent India could not just dispense with. Concerns on the continuity of educational institutions of such a nature were also considered crucial as the state could not bear the entire burden of public education. This context formed partly, the roots of the need for cultural and educational rights of minorities through the establishment and management of educational institutions.

At the outset, the Sub Committee on Minorities chaired by H.N. Mukherjee, a member of the Christian community, circulated a questionnaire seeking to account for the demands of the minority communities, in particular the nature of political, economic and cultural safeguards sought by them. Some of the responses received were by Jagjivan Ram, Khandekar and the All India Adi Hindu Depressed Classes Association, all of whom sought safeguards and representation for scheduled castes in the reservation of seats in the legislatures, ministries, public service and the judiciary; the Sikhs demanded special educational facilities and reservations in public services and reservation for the backward classes within their religion i.e. the Mazhabis, Ramdasias and Kabirpanthis and the reservation seats for the community in the Central legislature and the Central Cabinet. The Anglo Indians demanded a fundamental right to receive education in English and sought continuity, both, in English schools run by them and in receiving grants-in-aid by the state. R.N. Brahma from Assam wanted safeguards for tribal people living in Assam as well as those who had left the region and settled in the plains, in order to protect their own dialects and forms of religion and worship, in addition to reservation in legislature and public services. The Parsis and the Indian Christians did not put forth any specific demands.

From the above, two points stand out – one, the demand for continuation of pre Constitution educational institutions and grants to them, a point that formed an important part of Article 30 and its implementation in independent India. The other, is the claim of representation of backwardness within the religious minority (Sikh), a concern that is prevalent in the contemporary minority discourse in India.

When discussing the provisions that now constitute Article 30, some of the key arguments made were on the following provisions/issues (i) imparting religious instruction in state aided and recognised schools, (ii) State ‘maintained’ and state ‘aided’ institutions (iii) the term minority.

The aspect of imparting religious instruction was taken into account by establishing that “No minority whether based on religion, community or language shall be discriminated against in regard to admission into State educational institutions, nor shall any religious instruction be compulsorily imposed on them”¹⁶. The aspect of religious instruction was addressed at length in the discussions on Draft Article 16. This Article had little to do with minority educational institutions per se but did bring to fore the apprehension of religious education in state aided schools. Objections to imparting religious education in state funded

16 As mentioned in Clause 18 (2) of the Draft Constitution. *Constituent Assembly Debates (CAD)*, Vol.III, Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1949, p. 503.

schools or in aided, maintained and recognised denominational institutions was raised by K.M. Munshi, Purnima Banerjee, K Santhanam¹⁷ and H.N. Kunzru.¹⁸

The point on denominational instruction was reiterated with respect to ‘state maintained’ and ‘state aided’ educational institutions, with the former forbidding any religious instruction of a denominational character and the latter where religious instruction is allowed provided the rights of the minorities are protected (*CAD*, Vol. V, p. 24) This view was forwarded by S. Radhakrishnan who stated that this distinction reinforced the secular state in India. K.M. Munshi would seek to replace the word ‘maintained’ with ‘recognition’ as many schools received no aid from the state but were recognised by the state (*CAD*, Vol. V). While this may appear as a mere technicality, the Courts in independent India have adjudicated on numerous cases of denial and withdrawal of recognition by the State or Education Boards that have served as a violation of the fundamental right of both religion and language-based minorities under Article 30.

Lastly, the term minority itself was discussed. While ‘minority’ has not been defined i.e. the basis for declaring an individual or group as a minority, Ambedkar clarified that the import of the term was not merely technical but made way for cultural and linguistic communities as well. He opined,

“...for the purposes of this [Draft] Article 23, if a certain number of people from Madras came and settled in Bombay for certain purposes, they would be, although not a minority in the technical sense, cultural minorities. Similarly, if Maharashtrians settled in Bengal, they may not be minorities in the technical sense; they would be cultural and linguistic minorities in Bengal...” (*CAD*, Vol. VII, pp. 922-923).

Moreover, [Draft] Article 23 was not an obligation upon the state to aid and recognize an educational institution established by a religion or language-based minority. The provision says “...if there is a cultural minority which wants to preserve its language, script and culture, the State shall not by law impose upon it any other culture which may be either local or otherwise”. (Ibid) Over the course of the debates, non discrimination emerged as a central theme with discussions asserting that neither should the state discriminate against educational

17 There was also a possibility with the existence of numerous sects with certain religions i.e. Hinduism, that the state would have to recognize a plurality of religions. This led K Santhanam to argue, “In our country, even in the same religion, there are a number of denominations...we don’t want Saivaites to give Saivite instruction; the Vaishnavites to give Vaishnavites instruction, the Lingayats....We do not want to give even the slightest loophole for such controversies. Therefore, it is essential that all schools maintained by the State should have no religious instruction whatsoever...” *CAD*, Vol. V, p. 18.

18 H.N. Kunzru observed the following with regarding to state funding denominational institutions, “if we allow the State to give religious instruction in any school, it means that we accept the principal of a State religion and that there shall be something like an established Church...” *CAD*, Vol. V, p. 26.

institutions established by religion and language-based minorities and neither should these public educational institutions discriminate against wards seeking admission to their schools regardless of their denominational identity (H.N. Kunzru, Pandit Thakurdas Bhargava & M.A. Ayyangar)¹⁹.

By 1950, the debates stood settled and Article 30 formed a part of the Cultural and Educational Rights of Minorities in Part III of the Constitution and read as follows:

Rights of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions:

(1) All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

(2) The State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.

With the inclusion of this provision as also Article 29²⁰, the Indian Constitution had recognised the cultural diversity in India and sought its expression in the 'secular' space of education. The question arises as to how this legal acknowledgment played out in the implementation of Article 30. Does multiculturalism imply a passive acceptance of diversity or an active engagement with the diverse public space and distinct ways of life seeking a common ground? The following section looks into this aspect of the provision on minority educational institutions.

Multiculturalism institutionalised – a case of MEIs in India

'Institutionalisation' would imply the incorporation of multicultural provisions, in this case, Article 30 in the working of the Indian education system. One of the mechanisms that offers useful insights into the challenges and limitations of institutionalised multiculturalism in India are the court judgements of the High Court and Supreme Court. Besides setting judicial precedents, the Courts are guardians of the fundamental rights under writ jurisdiction. Hence, this section of the article would illustrate the workings of multiculturalism in India, with respect to minority education, by citing some landmark cases and would also examine the role of the Commission on Minority Educational Institutions. This would enable the reader to assess the transitions from legislation to policy and the challenges thereof.

19 *CAD*, Vol. VII.

20 Article 29: protection of interests of minorities: (1) Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same. (2) No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any one of them.

In 2004-05, the then Congress led UPA government announced the setting up of a Commission to look into the implementation of Article 30 of the Indian Constitution. The National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions Act, 2004 defined the term ‘minority educational institution’ means a college or institution (other than a University) established or maintained by a person or group of persons from amongst the minorities²¹. The Commission is tasked with looking into cases where educational institutions administered and managed by religion based minorities are not able to fully enjoy their rights. The obstacles are created by agencies of the state that seek documents for verification, affiliation and recognition. Often, there are delays in issuing minority status certificates to institutions seeking protection of Article 30. In many cases State Boards threaten to withdraw recognition and affiliation in educational institutions that are functional.

In the first ten years since its inception, the NCMEI undertook sensitisation drives across the country, touring different states and spreading awareness of the constitutional right provided by Article 30. Representatives from minority managed institutions also appeal to the NCMEI which has the powers of a quasi judicial body. Over the years that NCMEI has issued minority status certificates to minority managed institutions across India²². Since 2017, a large number of these institutions belong to the Muslim and Christian communities and are from states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Bihar²³.

The Commission however suffers from some significant limitations. The first is that it only addresses cases of religion-based minorities and not linguistic minorities. The second is the weak membership of the Commission pointed out in the beginning of the essay. At the time of its inception, the Commission had representations from the Muslim, Christian and Parsi communities. Later, members were drawn from the Sikh community as well. The intention being to make the Commission a representative body governing all the religion-based minorities in India i.e. those recognised by the National Commission for Minorities Act. At present, only one member constitutes the NCMEI i.e. Dr. Shahid Akhter. Else, the Commission seems to have been reduced to a mere administrative apparatus. This is significant to the Indian case as the Commission

21 The National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions Act, 2004.

See: https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/NCMEIAct2004.pdf

22 Access to information on the number of certificates issued by the NCMEI since 2005 can be found here: <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s33de568f8597b94bda53149c7d7f5958c/uploads/2023/09/202309272001146081.pdf>

23 The community wise publishing of information of minority status certificates issued started from August 2017. See, <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s33de568f8597b94bda53149c7d7f5958c/uploads/2023/03/2023031548-2.pdf>

was a noteworthy addition, a mechanism by which Article 30 could be claimed and asserted as a multicultural, fundamental right. Granted with powers of a civil court, the Commission helped remedy many issues that emerged as points of conflict, in particular to do with the 'minority' status of the educational institution/s and the issuance of No Objection certificates (NOCs). In addressing concerns on affiliation and deprivation of Article 30 on one hand, and the power to cancel the minority status of educational institutions on the other, the NCMEI has attempted to strike a balance between claims to the exercise of culture and the equal respect towards all religions as guaranteed by a secular state. The negligence on the part of the government to ensure a robust and representative membership of the Commission reflects partly, the lack of commitment towards the development of minorities.

Nevertheless, prior to the establishment of the NCMEI, it was the National Commission for Minorities and the Supreme Court and High Court that looked into questions concern minority educational institutions. It is pertinent then to peruse through the nature of cases that have come before the Courts in exercising the fundamental right provided by Article 30. As stated before, the acceptance and official recognition of cultural diversity is the initial condition, a precursor to the celebration of multiculturalism. How effectively the actors involved in this institutionalised set up determine whether multiculturalism has been promoted and upheld or exists as mere symbolism.

Since the court cases are numerous, this article would consider select Supreme Court cases to be examined. Petitions by minority managed institutions to the Supreme Court cover appeals on a range of issues concerning temporary recognition²⁴ and withdrawal of affiliation. The state (implying not just the Indian state, but also the states/federal units, education boards and municipalities within India) on its part perceives these as checks on the establishment and management of institutions. In the case of temporary recognition, the Court has held that while religion and language-based minorities can establish educational institutions of their choice, the management has to follow certain state regulations if it seeks state aid and/or state recognition. Thus, in the case of St Joseph's Teachers Training Institute, the recognition was under consideration. Yet the MEI in question chose to run the course and conduct a public exam. The Court held that the right to establish an educational institution under Article 30 does not entail a right to recognition, affiliation etc. The said institute has to abide by conditions for recognition or affiliation – as the case may be.

In the 1950s and 1960s the Supreme Court had to establish that Article 30 was applicable to *educational institutions established prior to the Constitution*. The 'establishment' of an institution should not serve as a reason for the state to

24 See, State of Tamil Nadu and Others v. St. Joseph Teachers Training Institute and Another, 1991, SC 87 and St. John's Teacher's Training Institute (for Women), Madurai and Others v. State of T.N. and Others, 1993, SC 595.

prevent recognition of a MEI or hinder its management. This was addressed by the Court in the Kerala Education Bill case, 1957²⁵, *Rev S.K. Patro vs. State of Bihar*, 1969, *S. Azeez Basha and Another v Union of India*, 1967 and *St. Stephen's v. University of Delhi*, 1991. Stating the purpose of Article 30, the Court declared, "...the establishment of educational institutions by minority groups as a cultural right was keeping in mind a number of denominational institutions and traditional centres of learning that existed in pre independence times". In the *S.K. Patro* case, the Court held that there wasn't any settled question of citizenship to contest whether those who established the educational institution were Indians. Hence, Christian missionaries as long as they were resident in India at the time of the establishment and management of the institution could claim the right under Article 30. However, in the case of *Azeez Basha* the Court read conjunctively and said unless it was proved that *Aligarh Muslim University* was established by the Muslim minority, the institution could not seek autonomy in administering the same. In the case of *St Stephen's* the Court held that if the College were to present 'a proof of establishment' then the appeals against it on arbitrary reservations for Christian students would not hold strong. The Court also asserted that affiliation to *Delhi University* did not divest *St Stephens* of its minority status. (SC 295)

There have been instances when State governments have passed what seem like diktats to MEIs that dilute and affect the impact the school or educational institution might have on the communities, both the minority which the institution represents and other community members as well. Thus, in the *State of Bombay v. Bombay Educational Society*, 1954, a school run by the Anglo-Indian community opened its premises to all communities. The State government however issued an order directing the school to admit only Anglo Indian and European students. The Court struck down the order saying that it violated the right of the minority educational institution and that of the citizens under Article 29²⁶. (SC 129) Within a decade of this case, the Supreme Court articulated the 'dual test'²⁷ as a method of ascertaining the limits to state intervention in minority educational institutions. In *Rev. Sidhajibhai Sabhai and Others v. State of Bombay*, 1962, the Court held that the right under Article 30 cannot be

25 "The language employed in Article 30(1) is wide enough to cover both pre-Constitution and post-Constitution institutions...Article grants two rights: (i) to establish (ii) to administer educational institutions of their choice...The second right clearly covers pre Constitution schools"

26 "...given the nature of Articles 29(1) and 30(1), the police powers of the State to determine the medium of instruction must yield to this fundamental right to the extent it is necessary to give effect to it and cannot be permitted to run counter to it".

27 State regulations meeting the 'dual test' meant that of the test of reasonableness, and the test that it is regulative of the educational character of the institution and is conducive to making the institution an effective vehicle of education for the minority community or other persons who resort to it" (SC 259, 1962).

“whittled down” by state regulations and excessive administrative interference would render Article 30 to be a “teasing illusion, a promise of unreality” (SC 259). The excessive regulation in this case amounted to a threat of withdrawal of aid and recognition to the institution run by the Christian community which admitted students from all communities. The Court followed a similar precedent in the *Rev. Mark Netto v. Government of Kerala* case, 1978, striking down parts of a state legislature that sought to unduly interfere in the administration of the minority institution thereby violating their right to manage an institution of their choice (SC 496)²⁸. The right to administer was upheld in other cases like *Gandhi Faizeam College, Shahajahanpur v. University of Agra*, 1975, *State of Bihar and Others v. Syed Asad Raza*, 1997 and *Yunus Ali Shah v. Mohammed Abdul Kalam & Others*, 1999, to name a few. While supporting the MEIs, the Court asserted that there was no right to maladminister and in *Lilly Kurian v. Sr. Lewina*, 1978²⁹.

With regard to extending recognition and assigning a minority status to denominational groups, the Court has made some interesting departures. For instance, in the *D.A.V. College v. State of Punjab*, 1971, case the Supreme Court declared Arya Samaj as a minority based on religion. Besides acknowledging the unique contribution of the Vedic culture, the Court used the precedent set in the *Kerala Education Bill* i.e. the state is the unit to determine the minority. However, the Court rejected the claims of the Jain community³⁰ and the Brahmo Samaj³¹, the latter, a sect within the Hindu religion, which sought the protection of Article 30.

The above case illustrations demonstrated how the state engages with Constitutional provisions addressing cultural concerns. From the perspective

28 The Court held, “...the dominant object of the said rule does not seem to be for the sake of discipline or morality....the said rule crosses the barrier of regulatory provision and interferes with administration of an institution guaranteed under Article 30”.

29 The right under Article 30(1) means, ‘management of the affairs’ of the institution. This right, however, is subject to the regulatory powers of the State. Article 30 is not a Charter of maladministration; regulation, so that the right to administer may be better exercised for the benefit of the institution is permissible.

30 In *Bal Patil v. Union of India*, 2005, the Commission said the state has to be a unit to decide the minority status of the Jain community, following which the National Commission of Minorities would designate such a status on the Jain community. Here, the Court invoked the ‘secular structure’ of the Indian State and urged the NCM to gradually reduce the number of notified minorities lest, “...it increases the fond hope of various sections of people getting special protection, privileges and treatment as part of Constitutional guarantee [and encourage] fissiparous tendencies [that] would be a serious jolt to the secular structure of Constitutional democracy”. (SC 464, 2005)

31 The Court held, “...reading Articles 19(1)(g) and 26(a) together, the petitioners have a right to establish and manage educational institutions and hence we do not think it necessary to decide the issue of minority/denominational status of Brahmo Samaj. See, *Brahmo Samaj Education Society and others v. State of West Bengal and Others*, 2004, SC 361.

of the state, liberal citizenship takes precedence over group recognition resulting in the state apparatus becoming assertive and imposing to the point of violating the fundamental right of the community to exercise its right. As shown above, the Supreme Court has sought to uphold diversity in practices when it comes to community and denominational educational institutions. However, the Court has been cautious in not allowing cultural diversity to compromise secular values of freedom of religion to all and a more integrative approach to questions of religion.

Conclusion

The Indian state, both independent and colonial, interacted with culture largely through the prism of religion. Religion often served as a site for accommodation and contestation and thus, the nationalist discourse articulated culture largely in religious terms. This is not to say that other ascriptive identities were not taken into account; only that religion tended to play a more dominant role in identity formation, recognition and assertion. The essay has attempted to show how the multicultural in India was examined through the prism of the secular and how secularism guided the language and discourse on minority rights. While multicultural avenues i.e. autonomy and self governance are contained in the Indian constitution, this essay focused on Article 30 – to do with educational institutions. In doing so, it has been seen how minority educational institutions became instrumental in identity formation and recognition. While the ‘secular’ remained the predominant concern in Constitution making and judicial precedents, a study of the MEIs reveals how the state can promote and encourage or deny and dissuade the enjoyment of rights by MEIs.

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Challenges to Multiculturalism. Exploring Indian and Italian Experiences

Edited by Enzo Colombo and Venkatanarayanan Sethuraman

India and Europe, despite having different historical paths, are today facing similar issues regarding the possibility of developing inclusive societies, capable of integrating diversity and difference in a context of democratic participation in common social and political life. The book illustrates how the debate on multicultural society is structured in India and Europe. In particular, it highlights the theoretical nodes around which specific multicultural policies are developed in India and Italy in relation to religious, linguistic, educational, institutional, and constitutional issues. Proposing a multidisciplinary perspective, the book shows how multicultural issues require rich and articulated theoretical tools to manage the richness and complexity of living together in difference.

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