Chapter 5
Should we give up on multiculturalism?

Enzo Colombo
Università degli Studi di Milano
Dipartimento di Scienze Sociali e Politiche
enzo.colombo@unimi.it
ORCID https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7231-5819

DOI https://doi.org/10.54103/milanoup.196.c369

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 co-existence 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 multiculture. 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 multiculture 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.

References

Aman, R. (2015). The Double Bind of Interculturality and the Implications for Education. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 36(2), 149-165. https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2015.1008431

Appiah, K.A. (2006). *Cosmopolitanism: ethics in a world of strangers*, W.W. Norton & Company.

Back, L. (2015). Losing culture or finding superdiversity. *Discovery Society*, 20. https://archive.discoversociety.org/2015/05/05/losing-culture-or-finding-superdiversity-2/

Back, L., & Sinha, S. (2016). Multicultural Conviviality in the Midst of Racism's Ruins. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 37(5), 517-532. https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2016.1211625

Banting, K., Westlake, D., & Kynlicka, W. (2023). The politics of multiculturalism and redistribution: Immigration, accommodation, and solidarity in diverse democracies, in M. Crepaz (ed.), *Handbook on Migration and Welfare* (pp. 210-229). Edward Elgar Pub.

Barrett, M. (ed.) (2013). *Interculturalism and Multiculturalism: similarities and differences*. Council of Europe Publishing.

Benhabib, S. (2002). *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*. Princeton University Press.

Butcher M., & Harris A. (2010) Pedestrian Crossing: Young People and Everyday Multiculturalism, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 31 (5): 449-453. https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2010.513080

Cantle, T. (2001). *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independnet Review Team*. Home Office.

Cantle, T. (2012). *Interculturalism. The New Era of Cohesion and Diversity*, Palgrave Macmillan.

Colombo, E. (2010) Crossing Differences: How Young Children of Immigrants Keep Everyday Multiculturalism Alive, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 31 (5): 455–470. https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2010.513081

Colombo, E. (2015). Multiculturalisms: An overview of multicultural debates in western societies. *Current Sociology*, 63(6), 800-824. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392115586802

Dupont, P-L., Sealy, T., & Modood, T. (2023). The relation between multiculturalism, interculturalism and cosmopolitanism in UK diversity politics. *Identities*. https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2023.2186622

Gilroy: (2006). Multiculturalism and post-colonial theory. In J. Dryzek, B. Honig & A. Phillips (Eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory* (pp. 656-674). Oxford University Press.

Glazer, N. (1997). *We Are All Multiculturalists Now*. Massachusetts, Harvard University Press.

Gorski: (2008). Good intentions are not enough: a decolonizing intercultural education. *Intercultural Education*, 19(6), 515-525. https://doi.org/10.1080/14675980802568319

Grillo, R. (2007). An excess of alterity? Debating difference in a multicultural society. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(6), 979-998. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870701599424

Hall, S. (2000). Conclusion: The multi-cultural question. In B. Hesse (ed.), *Unsettled Multiculturalisms: Diaspora, Entanglement, Transruptions* (pp. 209-241). Zed Books.

Honneth, A. (1996). *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. The MIT Press.

Huntington, S.P. (1996). *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*. Simon and Schuster.

Kendal, G., Woodward, I., & Skrbis Z. (2009). *The Sociology of Cosmopolitanism*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Korteweg, A.C., & Triadafilopoulos, T. (2015). Is multiculturalism dead? Groups, governments and the 'real work of integration'. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38(5), 663-680. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2014.907925

Kymlicka, W. (1995). *Multicultural Citizenship*. Clarendon Press.

Johansson, T.R. (2022). In defence of multiculturalism – theoretical challenges, *International Review of Sociology*, published online: 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2022.2045141

Loh, S.H. (2021). The continued relevance of multiculturalism: dissecting interculturalism and transculturalism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 45(3), 385-406. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2021.1963459

May, S. (ed.) (1999). *Critical Multiculturalism. Rethinking Multicultural and Antiracist Education*. Falmer Press.

McLaren: (1997). *Revolutionary Multiculturalism: Pedagogies of Dissent for the New Millennium*. Westview Press.

Meer, N., & Modood, T. (2012). How does Interculturalism Contrast with Multiculturalism?, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 33(2), 175-196. https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2011.618266

Meissner, F. (2015). Migration in migration-related diversity? The nexus between superdiversity and migration studies. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38(4), 556-567. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.970209

Meissner, F., & Vertovec, S. (2015). Comparing super-diversity, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38(4), 541-555. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.980295

Putnam, R.D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon and Schuster.

Rattansi, A. (2011). *Multiculturalism. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Safdar, S., Chahar Mahali, S., & Scott, C. (2023). A critical review of multiculturalism and interculturalism as integration frameworks: The case of Canada. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. 93, 101756, 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2023.101756

Sealy T. (2018) Multiculturalism, interculturalism, "multiculture" and super-diversity: Of zombies, shadows and other ways of being, *Ethnicities*, 18 (5): 692-716.

Semi, G., Colombo, E., Camozzi, I., & Frisina, A. (2009). Practices of difference: Analysisng multiculturalism in everyday life. In A. Wise & S. Velayutham (Eds.) *Everyday Multiculturalism* (66-85). Palgrave Macmillan.

Spivak, G.C. (1988) Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.) *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (271-313). University of Illinois Press.

Stokke, C., & Lybæk L. (2018). Combining Intercultural Dialogue and Critical Multiculturalism, *Ethnicities*, 18(1), 70-85. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796816674504

Taylor, C. (1994). The politics of recognition. In A. Gutmann (ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (pp. 25-74). Princeton University Press.

Vertovec, S. (2007). Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(6), 1024-1054.

Vertovec, S. (2010). Towards post-multiculturalism? Changing communities, conditions and contexts of diversity. *International Social Science Journal*, 61(199), 83-95. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2451.2010.01749.x

Vertovec, S. (2023). *Superdiversity. Migration and Social Complexity*. Routledge.

Vertovec, S., & Wassendorf, S. (eds) (2010). *The Multiculturalism Backlash*. Routledge.

Watson, S., & Saha, A. (2013). Suburban Drifts: Mundane multiculturalism in outer London, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 4(3), 2016-2034.

Wise, A., & Noble, G. (2016). Convivialities: An Orientation. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 37(5), 423-431. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2016.1213786

Wise, A., & Velayutham, S. (Eds) (2009). *Everyday Multiculturalism*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Wood:, Landry, C., & Bloomfield, J. (2006). *Cultural diversity in Britain*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Zapata-Barrero, R. (2016). Theorising Intercultural Citizenship. In N. Meer, T. Modood & R. Zapata-Barrero (Eds.) *Multiculturalism and Interculturalism. Debating the Dividing Lines* (53-76). Edinburgh University Press.

Zapata-Barrero, R. (2019). Methodological interculturalism: breaking down epistemological barres around diversity management. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42 (3), 346-356. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1538527