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CLASH OF CULTURES AND IDENTITY. SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF MULTICULTURALISM IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL CHANGES

The clash of cultures has turned out to be a particularly difficult contact. People from one culture find it hard to get rid of it, adapt a new one, a different one. The clash of cultures usually gives rise to conflicts and opposition. People wish to preserve their own roots and identity even after changing their place of living [1,16].

Ryszard Kapuściński

This quotation from Ryszard Kapuściński is a starting-point for a discussion on social aspects of multiculturalism as it reflects true reality of the present times – dynamic, changeable, and full of dangers resulting from the phenomenon of globalization. The XXI century is described as the *century of multiculturalism:* contact, dialogue, and clash of various cultures, their mutual relations, and in consequence, the necessity of coexistence of a society in a given country [2, 40]. Multiculturalism is the phenomenon commensurate with the history of the civilization which together with the progressive social change has been evolving for centuries. In the literature there are numerous interpretations of multiculturalism, often named as cultural pluralism or transculturalism. Regardless of the definition, the original meaning of this notion is the same or very close. P. Sztompka's approach deserves attention. He conceives multiculturalism in a dual way. Firstly, it is "abundance and variety of cultures, both the successive ones in the historical assessment and coexisting today" [3, 255]. Secondly, it is perceived as an ideological standpoint underlying various societies' right to different lifestyles, and even promoting a thesis of absolute equality of all cultures [3, 255]. Multiculturalism is also interpreted in the context of cultural diversity in which individualism and unique nature of each culture is accepted and thus respected. In a broader sense it refers both to the national phenomenon and social experiences. It also involves a rule of democratic coexistence of individuals as well as groups of the specific national identity, different traditions and values.

The idea of multiculturalism originated as late as in the 80s of the XX the century. Its first traces can be found in 1915 when Horace Kallen, an American philosopher, first introduced the term *cultural pluralism* [4, 21]. Kallen based his approach on the observations of immigrants who despite having been subjected to cultural assimilation tended to preserve the spectrum of qualities characteristic for their own nationality. All those processes connected with people's migration –

political, educational or cognitive, has become a starting-point for creating the present form of the study of multiculturalism [5, 32]. A theory of *'policy of appreciation'* by Charles Taylor also deserves attention. It assumes that human identity is shaped by dialogues and interactions with its social and cultural environment. Taylor claims that "proper appreciation does not only express respect, which people deserve, but it is, above all, an elementary human need" [4, 24-25]. Taylor distinguishes two types of policies being in a clash with one another**.** The first type concerns equal dignity and rights of the individual, while the second one stresses diversity of identities and groups. Such dualism of his views shows a paradox in comprehending multiculturalism. On the one hand, he points out the ideals of the equality and tolerance to all cultural diversities. On the other hand, he asserts that recognition of cultural equality is impossible as it leads to conflicts and tensions. Will Kimlicka represents a similar approach to multiculturalism. He perceives respect to other cultures in the context of compensation for injustices and the history of the nation. According to him, multiculturalism allows people to identify publicly with their own ethnic group and maintain their national identity [4, 28].

The idea of multiculturalism has itself gained a specific ambiguity. On the one hand it is still the term describing a kind of social status, fact or ideal within one community [6, 6]. On the other hand, the term stands for a specific project of the social politics institutionalized and sanctioned by the state. Such status quo drives at the intentional and conscious building of a variegated society, heterogenic, and hence departing from ethnic homogenization. Multiculturalism as the social-cultural phenomenon fulfils itself through functioning within a territorial-state mechanism of various systems**,** or sets of norms or values [7, 12].

Taking into account the territorial dimension of multiculturalism, correlation with the phenomenon of migration becomes evident. Migrations are the motive power of cultural contacts in the times of the social changes and globalization. According to Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, the contemporary migration is a natural process. She quotes the words by Ryszard Kapuściński, who says that "at the end of the century we have entered the third phase – the phase of decolonization of the Third World consisting in searching and finding their own identity and roots, so distinct from ours" [1, 15]. It is connected with the growing level of ethnic groups' consciousness. The groups, which have been rejected so far and marked with ethnic stratification, are currently searching for their own cultural identity.

Multiculturalism based on the rules of coexistence of different values and traditions defined within one state is getting a broader meaning and prompts to a deeper afterthought [8:

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2003]. It induces us to understand and tolerate all diversities, get rid of deep-rooted historical prejudices and stereotypes, and what is more, gives a good insight into foreign cultures, their systems of values, symbols, traditions, etc. Multiculturalism is also interpreted in terms of self-respect and respect to other cultures which allows to avoid employing a distinction between 'You' and 'We' proposed by Z. Baumam. Such a distinction contrasts representatives of our own culture to representatives of a foreign one [9, 44-48]. Acceptance of the foreign culture is then manifesting respect to it. According to M. Ratajczak, an understanding of your own behaviour is a key to respect diversities [10, 7]. It is equally important to realize that getting to know other cultures is in fact a question about our own one [11, 7]. Understanding other nations' culture is therefore determined by the awareness of your own culture and a deep knowledge of the foreign one.

The knowledge of rules of cultural relativism and following those rules have given theoretical foundations for an understanding of the characteristics and peculiarities of foreign cultures. What is this cultural relativism? It is defined as "suspension of our own deep-rooted cultural beliefs and evaluation of the situation employing standards of another culture" [12, 49-50]. Cultural relativism concerns a social sphere with its long-time dilemma of reconciling our own beliefs with the national culture in the evaluator's structure.

It is also defined as a methodological rule, "where an observer of one culture describes it making use of a perspective of an observer of another culture" [13, 84]. It functions as a useful tool in the process of eliminating prejudices against foreign cultures, developing tolerance indispensable to guarantee proper functioning within a small or big social group, micro- or macrostructure or between them.

The main determinant of the existence of multiculturalism is the phenomenon of cultural diffusion found in various circumstances and conditions throughout the centuries. It is defined as "the flow of cultural elements or whole groups or cultural configurations among different cultures" [3, 255]. From the dawn of history cultural diffusion has been triggered by *cultural meetings*. J. Mikułowski Pomorski describes it as a measure of the situation in which people from different cultures come into contacts with no intention of joining any of the cultures [14, 46]. The cultural contact, on the other hand, is "entering into interactions and social relationships by the groups living in distinct cultures" [3, 254]. Both phenomena are accompanied by intercultural communication which can take various forms, both verbal and non-verbal. Cultural meetings as well as cultural contacts illustrate all the cultural interactions whose traces can be found in the distant history of the civilization. They have been a function of numerous factors among which migrations of ethnic

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groups in search of new, more convenient living conditions is brought to the front. Diffusion of cultures has often taken place in such circumstances. It has been unintended diffusion, occurring with no conscious intention of socialization. The process of socialization in such a context is defined as "an elementary canal of transmission throughout times and generations" [12, 50].

Although the process of socialization usually proceeds in the scope of adapting to living in the new cultural environment, it must be underlined that it can also take place unintentionally during intercultural meetings and contacts. Those intercultural meeting and contacts among primitive people have taken different forms and occurred in various conditions. Some of them have been like a trade exchange by nature; others resulted from a sheer interest in other cultures. Most of them, however, have taken radical forms resulting from desire to gain power over other nations. There have always been a lot of cultural conflicts fed by aggression, which according to J.H. Turner always appear as a result of differentiation of cultures living in the varied environment [15, 49]. P. Sztomka treats the conflict of cultures as "aversion, hostility or fight between contacting groups of different lifestyles imposed by their own cultures" [3, 254].

Cultural conflicts constitute a sphere commensurate not only with primitive tribes, but they are also inscribed in the history of the civilization. According to J. Campbell, an American expert on comparative mythology, "history abounds in wars between cultural groups (..) and all the myths of illiteral people unexceptionally valued and even glorified wars" [16, 302-303]. Although the above mentioned approach presents exclusively the tribes from the beginning of the civilization, it is equally true for further epochs. Any time intercultural contacts and meeting have taken place; cultural conflicts of different characters have been born.

Intercultural contacts and meetings have not always led to conflicts. They have also been rich in positive phenomena, giving rise to diffusion of cultures. Intentional integration processes have been formed between cultures, both on the level of the single representatives of those cultures as well as whole ethnic groups. Those processes, apparent on the territorial borders of the ethnic groups, have been trading or military by nature which promoted economic development and safety in case of a military assault of another nation.

Cultural meetings of the integrative character have been accompanied by the phenomenon of cultural assimilation which in some aspects can be identified with the process of cultural socialization. Cultural assimilation is, however, a more complex process, as it proceeds in a few stages. It is necessary to fulfil a few conditions to make the complete assimilation feasible. J. Mikułowski-Pomorski cites M. Gordon's approach classifying those conditions as following: the first

one – acculturation consisting in taking over patterns of the assimilated culture by the representative of the assimilating culture, the second one - structural assimilation concerning pervading of the representatives of one culture to another, the third one – identification assimilation consisting in developing the feeling of belonging to a new culture by the representative of the foreign culture [14, 48]. Fulfilling the above conditions, or in other words going through all the stages of assimilation, makes it complete. It must be underlined that the complete assimilation does not concern integration processes laid out in a little time zone but deal with the long-term integration including even two generations. One stage of assimilation, alias acculturation, usually happens on the level of one generation.

One of the phenomena appearing alongside cultural diffusion is cultural shock defined as "a state of confusion and breaking norms and values, regarded as obvious, and ideas of the social reality experienced by the individuals during their contact with another culture" [17, 186]. Experiencing cultural shock allows to realize hidden presumptions and customs adopted in the process of socialization. In this sense contacts with another culture enable better knowledge of your own culture and factors conditioning the shape of socialization. A very similar theory has been proposed by G. Hofstede for whom cultural shock is one of the stages of assimilation but not acculturation. To prove this assumption, he uses a chart called *acculturation curve* which divides the process of acculturation into four stages. The first one is euphoria, the second – cultural shock, the third – adaptation, and the fourth – the state of equilibrium [16, 305]. Such a division is adequate to integration processes occurring in a relatively short period of time. G. Hofstede also points out the phenomenon of reciprocal cultural shock which is experienced during returning to your original cultural environment [16, 306]. In the process of acculturation, it is the communication which accounts for its dynamism. Your knowledge of customs and morals of a given culture, its history, tradition and heroes, and finally its language can substantially facilitate intercultural communication. Since educational factors help to win respect and trust of the representatives of foreign cultures, they also play an important role.

The analysis of the history of civilization let to draw a conclusion that multiculturalism has gained a greater influence on the process of building political, social and economic order, especially in times of numerous social changes. Undoubtedly, this range of problems is adequate to the surrounding, dynamically altering social reality. It reaches all the area of human activity and appears each time two or more cultures meet, either on the level of individual or small groups (micro scale) or whole culturally diverse social groups (mezzo or macro scale). The range of

multiculturalism is expected to evolve and in the near future it will become an indispensable condition for the proper functioning of a social individual in the macrostructure or so called "global village".

It is worth considering how multiculturalism changes our identity – both individual and social one. To start with, a profile of the identity must be done to diagnose well relations between these phenomena. J. Bauman says that: "Identity is not presented to you as a gift; it is something which needs to be built and can be (at least theoretically) built in various ways and does not appear at all unless it is built in one of these ways. Identity is then a task to be performed, a task from which there is no escape" [5, 8].

Identity (in the general meaning) is an immanent sphere of each social individual and each nation. This phenomenon, although theoretically easy to classify, brings a lot of difficulties in the precise defining its scale and range. Such difficulties result from the intractable separation of individual qualities of identity from the collective ones. It is caused by diffusion, occurring on the level of organizational structures, both in the macro, mezzo and micro scale. Diffusion needs to be analysed on two levels, strictly sub-connected with each other. The first level defines this term as social identity, thus concerns these qualities which are ascribed to the individual by the others. The qualities are regarded as indicators showing who the given person is or which social group he or she belongs to (or in fact, how many of them) [12, 52]. Taking into consideration the fact that each of us fulfils a certain number of social roles, it is quite evident how complex the human identity is. Since it is adequate to all groups, it is also called group identity. The second level is connected with individual identity or so called personal identity. It concerns the processes of self-development which give rise to the unique feeling of being yourself and incomparable attitude to the surrounding world [12, 52]. P. Sztompka defines individual identity as the one describing only the qualities which are not shared with anybody else. Taking into consideration the following approach we must admit that intercultural communication is mostly influenced by individual identity or in other words a group of personal features of a given social individual.

A special form of identity is called national identity. According to J. Błuszkowski "national identity defines an existential attitude of a nation as an independent social group" [18, 200]. In other words it is separating yourself as a representative of the nation from other groups you belong to. It means that you identify yourself as "I as Polish", "I as Portuguese". The feeling of national identity is also manifested through your national self – determination and qualities of another nation [14, 89]. Z. Bokszański shows this type of identity as a part of human interest in

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transformations of the contemporary nations and ethnic diversity within the borders of states – nations [20, 101]. J. Błuszkowski also turns our attention to Lippmann's approach for whom national identity is "a system or a mode of stereotypes standing for the project of our value, position, and in the world" [21, 9]. It must be underlined that national identity is determined by a few factors among which the most essential one is that the nation is described as a certain population, inhabiting a historical territory, possessing mutual memory, myths, uniform mass culture, common economy, territorial mobility and finally common rights and responsibilities for all the members of the group [14, 89]. It is also quite significant that we feel attachment to our nation, affiliation to it, show solidarity with it, and, what is more, reveal the feeling of a mission to fulfil. According to this mission, a given generation plays an important role in the history of the world and is the carrier of values [14, 89]. The phenomenon of intercultural communication is determined by national identity in various ways. On the one hand, it can influence communicative barriers thanks to creating ethnocentric attitudes and multiplying ethnic distance and ethnic stratification. On the other hand, it can develop respect and appreciation of the representatives of another culture.

At present, there are two interpretation of the notion of identity. The first one, represented by E. Erikson, identifies it with eight stages of human personality development. The second one, represented by P. Ricoeur, concerns the feeling of constancy, inner coherence, distinctiveness and continuality of time. P. Ricoeur presents another two distant kinds of identity. The first is called *idem-som* and describes everything what is the same, the second is called *ips-self* and describes the identity of yourself [5, 50]. Such an approach characterizes both statics and dynamics of the phenomenon, which accounts for susceptibility of the identity to internal stimuli affecting within a given structure and external ones resulting from the surrounding, thus cultural environment. He also describes 3 categories - coherence, constancy and distinctiveness.

Identity should be interpreted as the phenomenon created during socialization, and identified with forming the image of a given culture, both individual and collective one. Sociological analysis of this notion is more varied and accordingly interdisciplinary. It concerns peoples' understanding of themselves and what matters to them [12, 53]. Identity does not originate in the isolated social group, instead it is built on the bases of interactions which bring a lot of different experiences, then integrated in one, common system (Mamzer : 50). One must be aware that identity is very complex in its form and range. A lot of factors have effect on its diversity. The factors, according to H. Malewska-Peyre, concern not only values, past experiences and feelings but also influence creating the vision of the future [22, 15-17]. The future, in relation to identity, results from

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individual capabilities and desire to create yourself, to create qualities of your own nation which are independent from the received ones, and furthermore to create a given social individual's susceptibility to cultural stimuli resulting from contacts with the representatives of another ethnic group.

National stereotypes are additional elements shaping national identity. They may substantially influence proper cultural contacts and furthermore are important determinants of communication barriers, especially in terms of cultural diffusion. J. Mikułowski Pomorski turns our attention to Lippman's approach who claims that stereotypes are just "schemes created in our minds, fixed patterns influencing our understanding of the surrounding world and impossible to alter or verify" [14, 82-83]. Since stereotypes are such an important element creating our national identity, they pose a serious problem in case of cultural diffusion.

They are, however, not the only phenomena which can have a negative impact on the processes happening within multinational social groups. There are also prejudices which may significantly influence building barriers on the level of multicultural communication and interactions within multinational structures. They make up an element of ethnic stratification which results from social inequalities of particular ethnic groups [15, 30-131]. The idea of prejudices, in fact, amounts to subjecting the image of the outside world to simplified, schematic pictures. According to A. Giddens, prejudices concern opinions and attitudes of the members of one group against the other [12, 272]. They possess a very high level of subjectivism in assessing the surrounding social reality and are usually based on rumours and unverified information. What is more, they are hard to change even in the face of credible and objective information about the given culture. Another, significant quality of prejudices is their direct influence on creating stereotypes about a part of the social reality.

The phenomenon of ethnocentrism is another important negative factor of multiculturalism. According to J.H.Turner, it is "a tendency to perceive your own culture or subculture as better than other people's and nations' one" [15, 52,254]. It comes down to putting your own nation or ethnic group in the centre of interest and elevate it in order to cause social isolation or rejection. Teaching exclusively about your own country or nation at school or conducting international policy with the focus of your own national interests are good examples of ethnocentrism. On the other hand, healthy ethnocentrism results from the obligation to your own nation and country and is the expression of patriotism. Moreover it is a form of affirmation to your own culture with the simultaneous rejection or marginalization of others. According to G.Hofstede "ethnocentrism to a group is the same as ethnocentrism to an individual, that is, to perceive your

own little world as the centre of the universe" [16, 307].

According to P. Sztompka ethnocentric attitude is characterized by the conviction of a special value of your own culture. and what is more its advantage over the others [3, 245]. It is also understood as an inclination to form judgements about foreign cultures, referring to the standards bounding in our native culture. The phenomenon of national megalomania is an utter form of ethnocentrism. It is based on the conviction about singularity of your own nation. J.S Bystroń describes this phenomenon as centrality of a given nation. He claims that it is "the conviction that a given nation takes the most central position in the world. The largest value of the nation, created as the first one and thus entitled to power over the world, depends on the centrality" [23, 13-14]. The above analysis shows only partially the topic of the negative elements of multiculturalism. The phenomenon of ethnic distance, which is a function of prejudices of a given nation, ought to be bought up too. It is defined as a form of isolation from certain groups of people by discrimination, that is refusing them rights given to others [14, 81]. The extent of isolation from the society is determined by the scale of the social distance formed by Emory Bogardus, an American psychologist. Cultural incompetence is another phenomenon illustrating negative factors of proper interactions. P. Sztompka defines it as a lack of knowledge, skills, habits and impulses indispensable to make use of new electronic devices and accepting new ways of thinking, new patters of human relationships or organizational forms [3, 245]. Cultural incompetence results from many factors, for instance ignorance of a foreign culture. It arises from the educational issues or is embedded in mental spheres such as the above mentioned ethnocentrism, national chauvinism or intolerance.

Summary

The XXI century is described as the century of globalization and multiculturalism. Mass migrations, integration processes occurring in the contemporary world, changes, and transformations of political system make the world a global village. Such a situation creates possibilities of getting to know other cultures by the means of diffusion of cultures.

This article touches upon development of the theory of multiculturalism, changes in its interpreting under the influence of the factors which participate in its creation. Multiculturalism is undoubtedly a domain of democracy with its tolerance, at least theoretically, to all diversities. Multiculturalism, according to the contemporary approach to this topic, has become a domain of the modern societies which derive its modernity from the achievements of other cultures. Such a

situation is possible provided that diffusion of cultures takes place. Open borders can additionally favour the occurrence of this phenomenon.

Key words

multiculturalism, intercultural communication, cultural contact, diffusion of cultures, cultural assimilating, ethnic distance, tolerance, prejudices, stereotypes, national chauvinism national megalomania, ethnocentrism, and ethnic stratification.

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