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The faces of multiculturalism in contemporary Europe – between cultural integration and disintegration. Introductory remarks

Oblicza wielokulturowości we współczesnej Europie – między integracją a dezintegracją kulturową. Wprowadzenie w zagadnienie

*When the representatives of various cultures meet,
it gives rise to the complex processes of attracting and pushing away,
of suppressing and assimilating.
Then, violence and mimetic processes play a substantial part.*

(Wulf, 2016, p. 172)

Present-day Europe is subject to the advanced process of cultural differentiation of societies, that is of both historical, and contemporary provenance. As a result, we deal with multiculturalism, which is coming into existence in the so-far culturally homogeneous societies, or – in case of the already culturally diversified societies – it has deepened its heterogeneity. Concurrently, multiculturalism of such form has generated qualitatively different social relations in the cultural borderland, starting from the opened antagonism, through its passive form, segregation, open or hidden isolation, coexistence relying on mutual accommodation, assimilation connected with a complex, mutual adaptation, followed by approval and amalgamation, and last but not least, by cooperation (Golka, 2010, p. 100). With regards to these dimensions, special attention is drawn to tensions, which “take place within the area of consent for the existence of *some* form of diversity concerning its scope and the shape”, as well as the possibilities “(...) to construct a common platform of core values which would build the agreement at the state-level, and yet remaining a part of the so-far enigmatic

demands of the moral bond within the EU” (Biernacka, 2012, p. 21). In this context, a question of the status of multiculturalism is becoming primal, given the following manners of its comprehension:

- » communitarian, i.e. sanctioning coexistence of communities (one next to another) representing various cultures, acknowledging the image of the world which relies on the assumption that each and every culture is valuable;
- » liberal, granting the right to self-determination for the individuals, and allowing selective utilisation of the tradition and achievements (heritage) of the surrounding world (Biernacka, 2012, pp. 25-33);
- » intercultural, thanks to which the individual “in conditions of the borderland is not doomed to monoculturalism” (Sobecki, 2016, p. 19), where – on the ground of mutual relations and dialogue – a peaceful narration and opening to different cultures are possible, contributing in turn to the increased level of social capital, followed by integration or the establishing of joint, civic ground (Biernacka, 2012, pp. 49-50);
- » and last but not least, perhaps it is also worthwhile to consider the optics of transculturality, stemming from the assumption, that “our cultures in fact already lost their homogeneity and uniqueness, and they are thoroughly saturated with diversity and mutual interspersions” (Welsch, 1998, p. 203).

The defined understanding of the idea of multiculturalism generates and sanctions adequate political, economic, social, cultural and educational practices both in the area of a given state, as well as within supranational, international, i.e. European frameworks. At the same time, they are dynamized by the series of processes conceptualized through European strategies of reducing the perception of the diversity of other people and cultures. According to Christoph Wulf, such processes encompass logocentrism, egocentrism and ethnocentrism. “In logocentrism the European form of the rationality (*logos*) serves the purpose of deprecating or neglecting other forms of the rational thinking and actions. Egocentrism is orientated at a concentration on the own ego and its abilities to self-affirmation, an idea rather unfamiliar to the representatives of other cultures. Ethnocentrism (*ethnos*) entails these forms of thinking, feeling and acting that assume a kind of higher quality of the European culture with concurrent inferiority of other cultures entailed” (Wulf, 2016, p. 173). The three aspects can be recognized as specific rationalizations of multicultural practices within the European domain.

Taking the above into consideration, it is worthy to ponder over the phenomena generating different faces of multiculturalism in the European space, making reference to:

- » integration and the disintegration within European societies in their social and identity-related connotations, conditioned by globalization of the culture and the economic crisis,
- » collective memory and cultural safety,
- » multicultural and cross-cultural practices in the selected culturally diversified societies,
- » migrations and exile as generators of the internal as well as European policies, cultural transformation, social relations and attitudes,
- » citizenship in its educational, social and cultural connotations.

The above depict the specificity of multiculturalism, its complexity and the concurrent controversy within. Therefore, taking it all into account, it is worthwhile to recall the words of Ryszard Kapuściński, who implied that we shall “think, whether living in various cultures, civilizations, and religions, we want to search in other cultures for the worst things in order to strengthen own stereotypes, or shall we rather try to find meeting points. (...) – our world is at the crossroads. The certain tendency seems inevitable – we will live in the multicultural world” (Możejko, 2004, p. 161). Hence, facing the above, can we afford the interpersonal solidarity, the understanding and the agreement? After all, the basic feature of the human existence, as Jerzy Nikitorowicz underlines, “(...) is being in connection with others. Thus, the willingness and need of noticing, discovering, opening, closeness, cognition, understanding, exchange, and cooperation are all of great importance, as they enable human to achieve better understanding of own self and the possibility of understanding others better, reaching agreement with them” (Nikitorowicz, 2010, p. 15). It gives rise to the question whether we are ready for multicultural experience, leading to integration within the European space (also in domestic domains), or – perhaps – being subject to different diktats (mainly of political, social and economic provenance) we passively accept the vision of cultural disintegration?

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