

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AS A FACTOR OF IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Basia Nikiforova

Department of Ethics,
Institute of Culture, Philosophy and Art,
Saltoniškių g. 58, LT-08105 Vilnius, Lithuania
E-mail: bnikiforova@gmail.com

This article deals with religious pluralism as a factor of identity development. Multiculturalism is the key term used in describing and debating the national, cultural and religious pluralism in post-modern societies. The paper draws attention to the significance of the religious factor within existing multicultural contexts, as well as highlights some of the implications of religious pluralism might have for identity. The author offers to look on the new vision of identity as a potential way of its development and to analyze the changing of identity's criteria and borders. The religious pluralism is analysed in the context of such tendencies as the multicultural and multi-religious communities as a result of mass migration.

Keywords: identity, multiculturalism, national minorities and immigrants, religious pluralism.

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Introduction

Today the question of pluralism, especially religious pluralism, has become a key political issue. The increasing political presence of refugees and immigrants in contemporary Europe has generated debate about the nature of multicultural and multireligious society. The importance of policies governing the management of religious and ethno-religious diversity has increased in recent decades. According to James A. Beckford, "it is primarily because these faith communities have established themselves in public life to the point where they can confidently demand "equal respect" and "equality of opportunity" to practice their religion in private and public". "<...> religion becomes *more* controversial precisely at the time when it is in the process of losing its significance as a force shaping social and cultural life" (Beckford 1999: 55).

I am going to start with a few general remarks about religious pluralism. First of all, religious pluralism is not a method, ideology or daily fashion (as some people see it), but a reality, which is not possible to ignore. This is an element of political, social, cultural and religious life, which needs to be managed and accounted for in every public sphere. From Diana Eck's point of view, "pluralism is not an ideology, but rather the dynamic process through which we engage with one another in and through our very deepest differences" (Eck 2002). Many researchers look at religious pluralism as a "moving target" which will be impossible to analyze after it is stopped.

The European Union's (EU) official motto reads "united in diversity" and at first sight it seems that in terms of pluralism we have to deal with synonyms of diversity.

But pluralism is not just another word for diversity. It goes beyond the mere plurality or diversity to an active engagement with that plurality. When we analyze the precise configuration of all dimensions of diversity that distinguish one country from another in accordance with the religious history and religious composition of each, we will find the different level of diversity. It is important to ground the study of growing religious diversity in the framework of historical, cultural and social factors influencing the perception of diversification in every separate country.

Next, it is not possible to isolate the religious factor from the economical, political and social changes taking place in the rest of the society. When we start to analyze them, we will find that fascination with religion or indifference to it is a part of a process wider than merely the religious or worldview situation, and the religious pluralism as a part of diversity has a strong connection with the common possibility to choose from a big diversity of political, cultural and lifestyle preferences. It means that diversity or pluralism on the whole (same as in the religious sphere) is not only a process from the outside, but from the inside as well (traditional religious minorities, non-traditional religious movements, New Age, etc.). Of course, sometimes these religious and spiritual beliefs origin outside the European major faith traditions, but its followers are native and local.

Religious pluralism is usually researched from another angle: in the last decades the migration flows have reversed and many western European societies have instead become centers of global immigration. The demand for the recognition of cultural, religious, racial, and ethnic differences has come to occupy a central place in the forms of post-national politics today. The liberal imperative to tolerate and respect cultural and religious differences sometimes begins to be in conflict with sovereignty of the host society, where the more visible two challenges are “the refugee crisis” and terrorism.

“New” religious pluralism

In the changing historical circumstances new representations of religious pluralism replace the previous ones. Under the conditions of globalization “new” religious pluralism displays some innovative features: (1) The “new” pluralism has a strong national-ethnic character; (2) The “new” religious pluralism came to existence in advanced democracies where the protection of minorities’ rights provides ample opportunities for free faith; a tolerant attitude towards practically any traditional faith or religious innovation of an ethnic minority prevails; (3) There is a new dominating model of mutual relations between national-ethnic, religious minorities and the majority. The process of assimilating to the society of the majority is only taking place at the level of linguistic, professional and urbane adaptation. However, at the spiritual, value, cultural and religious levels there is the growing tendency of sticking to those local values and traditions that the minority has emerged from; (4) At the same time different countries have differently reacted and managed the new cultural, racial and religious demographic realities as a result of mass immigration (Tiryakian 2003: 26) (individualistic pluralism in France, communitarian pluralism in Britain and Netherlands or three basic European responses to the arrival of immigrant ethnic minorities: assimilation in France, the guest worker (gastarbeiter) system in German and the provision of the welfare state in Sweden); (5) The general religious

displays are the most visible and appreciable, but they do not always reflect the deep processes of differentiation, taking place inside the communities of religious minorities; (6) The emergence of “new” religious minorities (non-conventional, not rooted historically, or statistically insignificant in the past) who build their relationships with the national and religious majority on a different basis of adjustment. At the same time, there also is a complicated process of adaptation of the new religious minorities to the older (historically rooted) ones, who during their long stay in the Diaspora have developed features significantly distancing them from the new ones; (7) Several decades ago, the USA, Canada and Australia had a kind of natural monopoly on the issue of religious pluralism because these countries were founded on the basis of immigration. Even research in this area was concentrated in these countries. Today this monopoly has practically disappeared, now for European researchers the issue has become one of the most urgent ones. The most popular research subject is the difference between the USA and the European kind of religious pluralism: the *American exceptionalism versus the European exceptionalism* (James Backford, Jose Casanova, Grace Davie, Pippa Norris, Ole Riis and other).

In the article “Religion, European Secular Identities, and European Integration” Jose Casanova wrote that if we look at the EU as a whole, we will find two fundamental differences from the situation in the United States of America (USA). First of all, in Europe immigration and Islam are almost synonymous. Secondly, we will find a different role of religion and religious group identities in public life and in the organization of civil society. “Muslim organized collective identities and their public representations become a source of anxiety not only because of their religious otherness as a non-Christian and non-European religion, but more importantly because of their religiousness itself as the other of European secularity, Islam, by definition, becomes the other of Western secular modernity”. For him, “Americans are demonstrably more religious than the Europeans and therefore there is a certain pressure for immigrants to conform to American religious norms”. Casanova used Will Herberg’s thesis that the old European immigrants “found an identifiable place in American life” thanks to the “American exceptionalism” (Casanova 2004). European religious pluralism is moving to the stage of institutionalization in three different ways: toleration, denationalization and keeping individual religious freedoms. Each of them is very important, but the crucial marker for a democratic society is strong pluralism based on individuals’ right to religious freedom. Many researchers comprehend religious pluralism as a political principle: religiously pluralistic societies are based on the right to religious freedom.

The definition of “pluralism” has several meanings, depending on the respective discourse to which it refers. We distinguish several forms of religious pluralism. First of all, from the diachronic perspective it is an *emancipatory* pluralism that is connected with the individual’s right to religious freedom and is entailing a deethnicization of religion. Secondly, nowadays another form of religious pluralism is *identity-based* pluralism, which is marked by the demand from different religions for full and equal recognition of their individuality. The third type of dualistic forms or levels of religious pluralism are *individualistic* and *communitarian*. The researchers distinguish a few degrees of religious pluralism: weak, soft and strong. The identity-based pluralism as a source of identity development is more important for our subject.

Identity as “a moving target”

Now let us leave religious pluralism aside for a moment and make some preface remarks about the meaning of identity. The changes in national, cultural and religious identity, which are taking place in the EU, are often described by such definitions as “weakening”, “disappearing”, and so on. But changes in the national and religious identity mean the change, negative consequences of which represent only one side of this process. In his work *The Pleasure of the Text* written on a different subject, Roland Barthes argues that the difference is not at all the means to disguise or embellish the conflict; the difference gets over the conflict, exists outside of it and in the same time is close to it (Barthes 1975).

Identity is a broad term which describes the general aspects of an individual’s total personality – that is, the establishment, assimilation, or integration of societal norms, values, beliefs, and standards. Identity is determined by the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and environmental characteristics, and interactions of significant components of an individual’s unique world. Identity means “the sameness of a person or thing at all times in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else” (Simpson, Weiner 1989: 620).

Individual and collective identities were traditionally formed and supported through “internal” identification of *myself* with *my* own ethnic or religious group, and through “external” identification, distinguishing *ourselves* from the others. The other is represented as something ontologically external and hostile. Therefore they have to be assimilated, or banished. Concerns with the other allow forgetting personal problems and communal conflicts. However, the other does not exist outside *me*. He is a unique way of my self-identification. A person starts searching for identity from searching for the other within *himself / herself*. According to Brian Greenhill “the recognition of the ‘other’ is essential to constituting the identity of the self” (Greenhill 2008).

For instance, after “regaining their independence, the Baltic States have been constructing their political identities in terms of the East / West opposition. They have been creating narratives of belonging to the West, with the East as their threatening *other*” (Miniotaitė 2003: 214). The identity represents publicly expressed feeling of solidarity, the national, ethnic, and religious unity to which a person belongs and consciously identifies *himself / herself* with. Some researchers (Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm) say that an identity is some “imaginary make-up”. Anderson claims that ethnos is an artefact generated by cultural and political leaders (Anderson 1983). Nevertheless, Eastern and Central Europe is so much based on ethnic communities that questioning their ethnicity seems irrelevant.

As Zygmunt Bauman has clearly demonstrated, postmodern people are choosers who often face identity problems (Bauman 1999: 72). Bauman maintains that modernity has constructed the concept of identity, and post-modernity is occupied with its semantic destruction. He thinks that identity is still “a problem”, however, of a different character from the one within modernity. The modern problem of identity was how to construct identity and preserve its integrity and stability. The postmodern problem of identity is how to avoid ossification and preserve freedom of choice.

According to Barthes' remark about differences, we can find changes in the criteria and borders of identity. These changes can be defined as following: (1) the weakening factor of territorial belonging; (2) mass distribution of the people living in diasporas analyzed as a postcolonial phenomenon¹; (3) the demarcation of identity through the own racial and continental belonging; (4) religious belonging and activity becoming the most private side of the person' self-identification; (5) growing tolerance to a free choice in the religious life; (6) an individual person becoming the subject of free choice apart from belonging to any religious or ethnocultural tradition; (7) democracy and fundamental human rights being gradually included into religious priorities, their preaching and popularization becoming an important part of church activity; (8) in Europe, the strengthening Muslim factor leading to Europeans more perceiving themselves as Christians.

Religious pluralism and European integration

As mentioned before, it is important to ground the study of religious pluralism in the framework of historical, cultural and social factors influencing the perception of diversification in every separate country. At the same time, we should find common regularities and tendencies which are typical in Europe. Among the more important is the tendency of growing self-awareness of one's religious belonging, which is true to individuals as well as groups. Confronted by racism and social discrimination, religion reinforces cultural particularity and identity. As Peter van der Veer has observed, paradoxically, migration to the lands of unbelievers strengthens religious commitment of the migrants, "they tend to be more religiously conservative than their kin who have stayed in the countries of origin" (Van der Veer 1994). David Taylor has emphasized that "the growing awareness of one's religious and cultural distinctiveness has led to a setting up of boundaries that mark off the limits between the ethnic minority and the host society itself" (Taylor 1991: 208). We could make a common conclusion that the plurality of cultures is not only a plurality of ethnic styles, clothes and kitchen, but also a plurality of faiths and religions, the influence of which does not weaken in the host environment.

When looking at EU as a whole, we will find two types of subjects of pluralism: local ethno-national minorities and immigrants. Two decades ago the main targets of the regulating activities of European institutions were the autochthonous groups who are officially entitled as regional or national minorities. Today we observe that the problem of immigrants as a result of post-colonial policy and globalization is more visible than the problem of national minorities. A similar tendency can be traced in the analytical literature² of the last two decades. At the same time, the rights of local national minorities and immigrants of the

¹ "Diaspora" is the term often used today to describe practically any population which is considered "deteritorialized" or "transnational" and has originated in a land other than which it currently resides.

² Baumann, G. 1996. *Contesting Culture. Discourses of Identity in Multi-ethnic*. London. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Davie, G. 1996. "Religion and Modernity", in *Postmodernity, Sociology and Religion*, edited by K. Flanagan, K.; Jupp, P. 1997. *Islam in Europe: The Politics of Religion and Community*, edited by Vertovec, S., Peach, C. Basingstoke: Macmillan; Marty, M.; Appleby, R. S. 1993. *Fundamentalisms and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Moghaddam, F. M.; Solliday, E. A. 1991. "Balanced Multiculturalism and the Challenge of Peaceful Coexistence in Pluralistic Societies", in *Psychology and Developing Societies* 3: 151–172.

last decades are similar *de jure*. Both have the right “to preserve the essential elements of their identity, namely their religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage” (Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FC), article 5, 1). Also “a pluralist and genuinely democratic society should not only respect the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of each person belonging to a national minority, but also create appropriate conditions enabling them to express, preserve and develop this identity” (FC, Introduction). When looking at the articles of the FC regarding the rights of traditional national minorities (FC, articles 10, 2; 14, 2), we understand that they do not concern immigrants.

The identity support of local national minorities and immigrants needs different mechanisms to be implemented. This differentiation is connected with the situation in which the potential sources of immigrants are culturally distinct from the traditional European cultures, values and perception of democracy. Among more visible distinctions are the relations between an individual and a group (family), the social status of the woman and the daughter in the family and so on. For immigrants, the most important is the process of enculturation in the reality and culture of the host society. The development of concepts that help the process of enculturation must be relevant to local traditions and history. Edward A. Tiryakian claims that “different countries and different segments of the “host” population have reacted differently to substantial immigration and to new multicultural and multiracial demographic realities” (Tiryakian E. 2003: 26–27).

There are a few cities in Europe (Leicester, Frankfurt on Main, Malmö) that are considered as cases of best practice of multiculturalism. All these cases belong in the framework of multiculturalism, human rights and its realization in the democratic society. Each of them has its own specific characteristics, different social policies, diversity management, and different kinds of immigrants (“once” or “twice” migrants). But the feature that is typical of all these cities is that ethnic diversity is not merely bipolar (whites or nonwhites). It was the magnet not only for immigrants from East Africa, Asia, India, Pakistan and the Caribbean but also for the European migration of Poles, Ukrainians, Serbs, Lithuanians and Eastern European Jewry (Winstone 1996). From the middle of the 1980s the demographic and religious situation in these cities has been challenged by the Muslim community.

What has changed in this multicultural situation from religious point of view? The answer is: the variety of religious groups; the number of faith communities which are separated from the Christian faith tradition; the popularity of religious and spiritual beliefs or practices that are outside the world’s major faith traditions. The next question is the relationship between multiculturalism and the religious pluralism, the answer to which is very important to us. The links of the chain “globalization-migration-multiculturalism-religious pluralism” do not have a strong relationship. Ethnic and religious minorities exist in countries, where immigration does not have a crucial influence on the demographic situation (Lithuania, Poland). Lithuania seems to have been characterized by two signs: it is an ethnically homogeneous society and an immigrant-free country. According to the census conducted in 2001 year 83.45% of the population identified themselves as Lithuanians, 6.74% as Poles, 6.31% as Russians, 1.23% as Belarusians, 2.27% as members of other ethnic groups and, what is very important, the Lithuanian citizenship accounted for 99% of the population. Among the Baltic States, Lithuania has the most “homogeneous” population from the view of level of citizenship.

In the case of Lithuania, referring to the chain “globalization-migration-multiculturalism-religious pluralism”, we don’t really find the pressure of immigration. Massive immigration is not typical to Lithuania at all. On the contrary, today the process of migration has a one way ticket to Western Europe, the process of globalization is mostly on the investment and consumer levels and does not strongly influence the identity. Today, over 80% of the population consider themselves Catholics, while ethnic Lithuanians are 94% Catholics. Catholicism is an inseparable and vital part of the Lithuanian culture.

But “now the situation of the Church is changing: it is becoming something marginal to the major centers of power and influence”, but its traditional religious norms and values are still legitimate and integrate Lithuanian society (Vosyliūtė 2007: 97).

According to Irena Vaišvilaitė, “the differentiation of religious communities in Lithuania is based on the historical-cultural criteria rather than the legal” (Vaišvilaitė 2000). A new openness to the religious pluralism was to be observed in the first years of the Lithuanian independence. All existing religious organizations were divided into the traditional and other (non-traditional) (do not confuse with NRM). The traditional religious associations are considered to be those that have existed in the country for centuries and created moral and cultural values. The State also recognizes that other (non-traditional) religious associations provided they have existed in Lithuania for 25 years or longer and has public support, are a part of the historical, social and spiritual heritage of the country (Glodenis 2005). Some of the “other” religious groups have only a few hundreds of followers. But if we look at the numbers of weekly attendance of the church of Jehovah’s Witnesses, Word of Faith or Hare Krishna, we will find that the believers’ participation is almost 100%. In her famous report “Believing without Belonging: Just How Secular Is Europe?” Grace Davie used the definition “a culture of obligation” *vice versa* “a culture of consumption” which “really means choosing or “we go to church if we want”. In this sense Lithuania is a country where “a culture of obligation” is high enough in traditional as well as in non-traditional religious associations.

De facto Lithuania is not a multicultural or multireligious country but some features of multiculturalism are a part of state policy for promotion of ethnic, national and religious integration, which are carried out in education, mass media and social spheres. This policy has a comparatively small influence on the day-by-day life, but according to the public opinion, the freedom of religion is the highest and most fruitful result of the policy of Lithuania as an independent state.

Religious pluralism does not adopt the same forms in Western and Eastern Europe. The Eastern European religious pluralism is rather moderate. The situation of religions in our part of Europe can be characterized by national and religious homogeneity, prevalence of regional national and religious minorities and vigorous activities of non-traditional religions. But Eastern European countries are at the very beginning of the European integration. It will take years for the more tangible results of this process to appear. If Eastern European countries become more attractive to foreign investors and “guest-workers”, the Eastern European religious pluralism will get similar to that of the Western Europe. We have to acknowledge our own history, our own past and find our own solutions. What we cannot to do is simply “borrow” a solution from another country.

Conclusions

Our common conclusion is that in the diasporic, multicultural context, the plurality of cultures is first of all a plurality of faiths and religions, the influence of which does not weaken in the host environment. Religious pluralism is not a method, ideology or daily fashion, but a reality, which is not possible to ignore. Today, the demand for the recognition of cultural, religious, racial, and ethnic differences has come to occupy a central place in the forms of post-national politics. This is the element of political, social, cultural and religious life, which needs to be estimated and managed in every public sphere. It is necessary to find mechanisms for the implementation of identity support for local national minorities and immigrants. *De facto* Lithuania is not a multicultural or multireligious country but some features of multiculturalism are a part of state policy for promotion of ethnic, national and religious integration, which are carried out in education, mass media and social spheres.

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RELIGINIS PLIURALIZMAS KAIP TAPATUMO RAIDOS VEIKSNYS

Basia Nikiforova

Santrauka

Aptariamas religinis pliuralizmas kaip tapatumo raidos veiksnys. Multikultūralizmo terminas čia vartojamas, siekiant apmąstyti ir aprašyti tautinio, kultūrinio bei religinio pliuralizmo ypatumus postmoderniosios visuomenės sąlygomis. Čia susitelkiama į religinio veiksnio reikšmę šiuolaikiniams multikultūriams kontekstams, pabrėžiant tam tikras religinio pliuralizmo apraiškas, darančias įtaką tapatumui. Straipsnio autorė ragina apmąstyti naują tapatumo viziją kaip galimą jo raidos būdą ir imtis kintančių tapatumo kriterijų ir sampratų analizės. Religinis pliuralizmas čia tyrinėjamas atsirandančių multikultūrių ir multireliginių bendruomenių kūrimosi tendencijų kaip masinės migracijos pasekmės kontekste.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: tapatumas, multikultūralizmas, tautinės mažumos, imigrantai, religinis pliuralizmas.

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