Beyond the Limits of Multiculturalism:

The Role of Europe's Traditional Minorities

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In the debate on multiculturalism in Europe, traditional minorities are often excluded even though their experience with diversity is longer than most. This is because the received wisdom in Europe seems to equate multiculturalism with immigration and lately mainly with Muslim communities. This is different in the Anglo world, especially in the context of Canada and Australia, where traditional minorities and indigenous groups are considered a dimension of multiculturalism[1]. However, traditional minorities have been part of the European fabric of cultures for centuries, and they have contributed to making multiculturalism work through a number of inter-cultural dialogue mechanisms. This Issue Brief will discuss the role of traditional minorities in multiculturalism, in particular in terms of institutional arrangements at different levels of government.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A traditional minority refers to a group of people which has lived traditionally in a certain region for many years but which does not identify with the culture of the majority of the people in that region. It refers to national and linguistic minorities defined by the territory where they live because they are long-established in and rather fixed to that territory which they see as their homeland. In addition to identifying differently than the majority with the national and linguistic profile of the state where they live, they may also identify with a different religion. Excluded from this definition is identification on the basis of race or migration. Traditional minorities are also referred to as 'old' minorities because they have a very long history as

minorities. This is in contradistinction to 'new' minorities which are more recently formed minorities, usually immigrant communities. These categories are not perfect but can be helpful from a point of view of analysis. Often they enjoy some collective autonomy powers in terms of collective political and/or cultural autonomy based on group identity. This may be formal autonomy arrangements as well as informal arrangements. Either way the autonomous powers are territorially defined even if they are termed non-territorial. The difference lies in whether the minority has some 'title' to the region or not.

One might thus ask whether such old and long-term minorities are not an anachronism in the 21st century debate on multiculturalism. However, for traditional minorities the diversity challenges of 21st Century are not unfamiliar because they have been steeped in diversity politics for centuries at many levels, the personal, the communal, and the public space. Traditional minorities have been the objects of diversity management since 1555 and the Treaty of Augsburg, first as religious minorities, later after the Congress of Vienna as national minorities, and since the Peace at Paris in 1919 as linguistic minorities. Since 1966 and the adoption of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), these various minorities have been grouped together in international law. Throughout this long period in Europe's history traditional minorities have been faced with governments' policies on diversity. It is the latter that is the focus of this paper; more precisely the inter-action with public authorities and governments.

This is not to argue that the experience of traditional minorities can be dictating solutions for other groups in multicultural societies. But some of the arrangements that exist for traditional minorities in Europe could perhaps inform the debate on integration of immigrants. The point is that there is a dimension of diversity in Europe which has developed a feasible approach to multiculturalism, thus questioning that multiculturalism has limits.

II. ON MULTICULTURALISM AS DEMOCRATIC FRAMEWORK

In discussing multiculturalism, it is important to remember that there are several dimensions to multiculturalism that are usually and mistakenly jumbled into one and thus creating confusion. Multiculturalism has at least four dimensions.[2] First, "multiculturalism-as-a-fact" is the sociological dimension which establishes that our societies are for a fact composed of culturally diverse groups – since the exodus from Palestine this has been the reality. Second,

"multiculturalism-as-ideology" refers to the human rights dimension of dignity which holds that multiculturalism promotes freedom of the individual and equality for all while also offering protection of cultural groups – since the League of Nations and the Minority Treaties this has been a European reality and since the adoption of the ICCPR in 1966 this has been a global reality. Third, "multiculturalism-as-policy" is the democratic dimension ensuring that diversity management becomes institutionalized in the governing of modern societies – since 2000 this has been the approach in the EU. And fourth, "multiculturalism-as-ethics" is the communication dimension which now is being recast as inter-culturalism and dialogue, but which includes more than dialogue because it refers to the need to go beyond tolerance in order to show respect – since the emergence of religious tolerance in the philosophy of John Locke and others this has been the belief in Europe.

The fact that there are limits to multiculturalism in Europe is a political debate which has ironically been promoted by governments. Thus, in 2008, a new discourse was started by Council of Europe's "White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue"[3] from the Committee of Ministers as well as the 2009 UNESCO "World Report on Cultural Diversity."[4] The White Paper argued that multiculturalism had failed and that inter-culturalism should be the preferred model for Europe, whereas the UNESCO Report called for a post-multiculturalist alternative globally. These texts see inter-culturalism as the next generation of democratic frameworks for diversity. They hold that inter-culturalism and inter-cultural dialogue will overcome the limits of multiculturalism, and inter-culturalism will promote integration over 'balkanization', fractionalized societies and xenophobia. It is important to remember that these two organizations have traditionally been the standard bearers of multiculturalism.

Academics have also been critical of multiculturalism in favour of inter-culturalism which they have defended through four

arguments. First, they see inter-culturalism as co-existence+ because it implies better communication.[5] Second, they believe that it synthesizes many groups into a common patchwork,[6] and third they argue that it promotes cohesion through mutual integration.[7] Finally and fourth, they see inter-culturalism as a critical approach to relativism because it allows for separating religion and ethnicity.[8] However, lately, a correction to the academic debate has argued that inter-culturalism is no different than multiculturalism.[9] All the characteristics mentioned above – co-existence+, synthesis, cohesion, and critical approaches to relativism – are also part of multiculturalism. For instance, they argue that inter-cultural dialogue is not new to multiculturalism. People in multicultural societies have inter-faced for years. Research on street planning in Amsterdam has shown that immigrant communities are in fact very active in communal meetings.[10] Communication is clearly a part of multiculturalism; and with communication comes increased cohesion. Another example is relativism. A staple part of multiculturalism is the human rights discourse, especially the protection of the weak and the vulnerable, including young girls and women who are often more likely to be the victims of relativism.

Therefore, prominent academics have argued that the inter-culturalism discourse started by the Council of Europe and UNESCO is in fact nothing but rhetorical, political hype to show that governments want to take the attention away from the difficulties arising from multiculturalism by giving it a new name.[11] Moreover, multiculturalism has been credited on the wrong premises because social science research shows that the same governments that adopted the White Paper and the World Report have done nothing further to try to implement inter-culturalism instead of multiculturalism. And finally, social science research shows that multicultural policies are in fact having an effect. Parliaments, the media, public spaces and work places are increasingly becoming multicultural.

III. ON TRADITIONAL MINORITIES AND INTER-CULTURAL DIALOGUE

In academia, two discourses have been prominently defining traditional minority existence in Europe.[12] The security discourse represents the many settlements in Europe, bilateral or multilateral, that included protection of minorities. The justice discourse emerged with the establishment of the human rights regime after World War II; a regime which first did not include minorities but that later with the ICCPR began developing a minority protection approach which has now emerged into a separate human rights sub-regime of minority rights. The justice discourse has basically created a regime of minority rights and minority protection in Europe that is second to none in the world. This is a regime that is both legal and political and is derived from international standards adopted at the inter-governmental level in Europe.

The legal part of the regime is quite well known. In addition to non-discrimination rights, it includes cultural rights derived from the human rights regime as well as expanded cultural rights developed through the democratization efforts of the Council of Europe. As countries have signed up to these standards, minority rights have also been included in domestic laws.

The political part of the regime is perhaps less well-known. It started in earnest with the work of the CSCE with the issuing of the Copenhagen Document in 1990 setting high norms for how governments' should protect national minorities. This work continued in the work of the HCNM with conflict mitigation as the main part of the mandate. And it is the political sphere which lacks the foundation for law through ongoing negotiation. This is a function of 'the political' which is often overlooked.

The point is that both legally and politically, traditional minorities have had to fend for themselves for years. They have done this with some success in a number of countries, Switzerland, Belgium, Finland, Spain

(Catalonia) and Italy (South Tyrol). These are the well-known cases of minorities who have achieved inclusion at different levels in the management of the societies where they live, either through power-sharing institutions or special representation. Whether we call these multinational or multicultural is actually irrelevant; they are countries which have had to deal with the fact of multiculturalism.

But also smaller minorities with less 'strength' in terms of power have achieved inclusion in the democratic affairs of multicultural states through consultative bodies, such as inter-ethnic commissions, committees addressing specific issues, or at the local level by sitting on municipal councils or school boards. Some traditional minorities have offices attached to parliaments, sort of lobbying offices.[13] Finally, some even have offices or representation in Brussels aimed at influencing the EU through lobbying activities.[14]

Thus, examples of consultative bodies and functions are found in many European countries at both state and local levels where minorities are recognized and constitute a portion of the population. It is actually easier to mention the countries that do not have such bodies, France and Greece. The more recent examples are found in the Balkan countries, Croatia and Serbia as well as in Romania and Poland. Older versions are found in Scandinavia and Germany where bodies were established during the Cold War. And there traditional minorities also have offices attached to the national parliaments. Unfortunately, consultative bodies are less popular in the Baltic states where there is a need for such.

Consultative bodies allow traditional minorities a say in local affairs and sometimes national affairs. They create a dialogical space where diversity meets. Although the term 'consultative' implies a one-way communication, i.e. the majority listening to the minority, traditional minorities have at times managed to use the participation in these bodies to seek influence more broadly. For instance, in the Danish-German border region, the Danish and German minorities on either side of the border now participate in the local INTERREG commission and in regional development fora.[15] They have also recently participated in a working group to secure access to kin-state media through communication channels. In Austria, Italy, Hungary and Slovakia, traditional minorities participate in the development of the European Groupings of Territorial Co-operation (EGTCs) that have been established in the Danube Region.[16]

Moreover, because of their linguistic diversity, i.e. speaking both their mother tongue and the national language, these minorities have gained a bi-cultural understanding of the economic problems of the region. With this ballast, they have at times become innovators seeking funding and support for cross-border projects that can help develop the region. Thus, the national minorities in the Danish-German border region have instigated an express bus shuttling students enrolled in a cross-border MA across the border to and from two campuses – it is a public bus with regular schedule also for the general public. And they proposed a German ambulance helicopter which now covers both sides of the border.[17]

And to show that the system is also based on dialogue between the minorities and the majority, the prime example is the Schleswig-Holstein Commissioner for Minorities, a post which has existed since 1988.[18] The Commissioner is always appointed by the Minister President of Schleswig-Holstein and reports directly to him or her. The Commissioner's mandate is to act as liaison between the traditional minorities in Schleswig-Holstein and the government. This is in addition to a number of standing committees and commissions that have existed since the Cold War. At the national level, Germany established in 1992, a Commissioner on National Minorities and Returnees. He reports directly to the Minister of Interior and functions as a liaison for ethnic German groups at home and abroad.

Finally, there is the EU level. Here history is still being written. The above mentioned representational offices in Brussels have been used especially by traditional minorities living in federal sub-state units to create interest especially among MEPs for the issues that traditional minorities face in their region.[19] Thus, at times traditional minorities are able to bypass the central governments and get influence directly at the centre of elected power. It shows that diversity politics promoted by traditional minorities has entered the halls of the European Parliament.

IV. CONCLUSION

The debate on multiculturalism needs a correction: for centuries Europe has been a culturally diverse society and for centuries governments have had to deal with diversity management. Since the middle of the 20th Century mechanisms to govern multicultural societies have been implemented with regard to traditional minorities by certain European governments. These mechanisms provide the space for inter-cultural dialogue and bring together minorities and majorities in established fora of exchange and debate. And experience shows that they have worked. The fact that these mechanisms are not more widely implemented is a question of political will and governance. But there is no reason why the concept could not be applied to other minorities and immigrant groups. Perhaps a return to 'old' multiculturalism could inform and improve the much maligned debate on the limits of multiculturalism.

Footnotes

[1] Nasar Meer & Tariq Modood, "How does Interculturalism Contrast with Multiculturalism?", Journal of Intercultural Studies, Vol. 33, No. 2 (2011), pp. 175-196

[2] Tove H. Malloy, "Conceptualizing Democratic Diversity Management for Multicultural Societies: Theories of Society and Law" in *European Yearbook of Minority Issues*, Vol 6, 2006/7.

[33] White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue "Living Together As Equals in Dignity" Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs, 118th Ministerial Session, 7 May 2008 available online at www.coe.int/dialogue.

[4] "Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue", *UNESCO World Report*, 2009 available online at http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/resources/report/the-unesco-world-report-on-cultural-diversity/.

[5] P. Wood et al., Cultural Diversity in Britain: a toolkit for cross-cultural co-operation (Rowntree, 2006)

[6] L. Hammer "Foreword" in Powell and Sze (eds.), *Interculturalism exploring critical issues* (Interdisciplinary Press, 2004)

[7] C. Joppke, "The retreat of multiculturalism in the liberal state: theory and policy" in *British Jounal of Sociology*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (2004), pp. 237-257.

[8] R. Hansen, "The Danish cartoon controversy: a defence of liberal freedom" in *International Migration*, Vol. 44, No. 5 (2006), pp. 7-16.

[9] Meer & Modood, "How does Interculturalism Contrast with Multiculturalism?", op. cit.

[10] Jean Tillie and Boris Slijper, "Immigrant political integration and ethnic civic communities in Amsterdam" in Seyla Benhabib et al. (eds.), *Identities, Affiliations, and Allegiances*, Chapter 9 (Cambridge University Press, 2007)

[11] Will Kymlicka, "Comment on Meer and Modood" in Nasar Meer & Tariq Modood, op. cit.

[12] Tove H. Malloy, "National Minorities in the 21st Century Europe: new discourses, new narratives?", *ECMI Issue Brief* #24, December 2010

[13] Office of the German minority in Denmark at the Danish Folketing, and the minority representation at the German Bundestag

[14] See, Michael Keating, *Paradiplomacy in Action*, (Frank Cass, 1999).

[15] *Competence Analysis: National Minorities as a* Standortfaktor *in the German-Danish Border Region: Working with each other, for each other* prepared by the European Academy (EURAC), Bolzano/Bozen and published in 2008.

[16] See, http://www.interact-eu.net/egtc/egtc/30/16.

[17] *Competence Analysis,* op. cit.

[18] *Minderheitenbericht*, Schleswig-Holstein available online at http://www.schleswig-holstein.de/STK/DE/Schwerpunkte/Minderheitenpolitik/Minderheitenbericht/Minderheitenbericht_node.html.

[19] See, http://www.europaregion.info/en/161.asp.