

The Politics of Multiculturalism

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‘The Perils of Multiculturalism: A Theoretical
and Area Studies Approach to the Former USSR’

Introduction

Multiculturalism was introduced in Canada and Australia in the 1970s and then modified in the 1980s. Other liberal democracies have also introduced elements of multiculturalism in a drift away from the assimilationist and homogenising tendencies of the classical French nation-state. This is partly a response to containing the growth of regionalism and is itself a tacit recognition that total assimilation of national minorities never occurred, even in France. Globalisation has also served to increase cultural interaction. This paper is divided into three sections. The first section reviews the literature on multiculturalism while the second surveys the criticisms of multiculturalism. The final section attempts to apply multiculturalist policies to the Soviet successor states.

The advantages of multiculturalism

Although multiculturalism in its varied forms has been discussed and introduced in certain western countries since the 1960s and 1970s within academia liberal approaches still predominate.¹ But not only liberals have tended to see ethnicity as getting in the way of creating a civic nation; socialists have also tended to prefer class solidarity to ethnic particularism. In the United Kingdom, for example, the Labour Party has united the working classes of England, Scotland and Wales to champion policies that, until recently, ignored and belittled the national questions.

The very use of the term ‘multiculturalism’ seems confused and therefore has many definitions. It has been defined in at least four ways:

- within a demographically diversified population due to migration;
- as policies to protect ethnic and national minorities;
- *vis-à-vis* a post-national utopia;
- political correctness and identity politics at American universities.²

Multiculturalism teaches the citizens of a democratic society to value diversity and differences, helping to integrate diverse cultures into the larger society without cutting them off from their past. This, in turn, helps to reinforce the polity because citizens are willing to make sacrifices for those with whom they share a common project. This helps to forge a common ‘We’ which is necessary in the event of an external threat to the country from ‘Others’.³

Leo Kuper argues that multiculturalism is perfectly in keeping with liberal democracies which are, of themselves, pluralistic. Integration is promoted by the diffusion of common values. These include the communal affinity of élites, respect for the rule of law, moderation in politics, commitment to gradual change and the recognition of the dignity of values in other societies. Political pluralism and social welfare policies therefore cross-cut

loyalties and common values.⁴ But plural societies are not necessarily the same as those with multiculturalism because one majority ethnic group could still dominate the remainder.

Another problem which multiculturalism seeks to address is the question of nation and state building. Walker Connor has pointed out that during the last one hundred years no nations have voluntarily assimilated: nation building is also therefore nation destroying.⁵ The growth of the French nation-state between 1789-1914 aimed to assimilate the peripheries (Provence, Brittany, Alsace) that of the dominant, core French culture and language. French nation building therefore also involved nation destroying. The degree to which this nation destroying was successful is now in doubt as the imposed homogeneity of many nation-states has since proved to be largely fictitious, as reflected in the growth of regionalism.

The traditional understanding of nation and state building are also hampered by other definitional problems. 'Imperialism' is usually only applied to the actions of states, or nation-states, *vis-à-vis* other ethnic groups or states. But is this really the case? Would not Bretons also have initially seen the imposition of French rule over their territory as 'imperialist'? During the nineteenth century liberals, Marxists and socialists believed that self determination and nation building was for the 'historic' nations (for example, the English, French, Germans and Russians). 'Unhistoric nations', such as the Bretons, Czechs and Ukrainians, had to be forcibly assimilated into the French, German and Russian nations respectively.

If nation building is also nation destroying then the latter also qualifies as an act of 'cultural imperialism'. There is a moral distinction, Margaret Moore therefore argues, between insisting on the inviolability of territorial boundaries against external aggression and insisting on the forcible inclusion of peoples against their will within borders. Consequently:

'the term "imperialism" can be coherently and persuasively applied to any attempt by one people to dominate politically another people, especially if the latter perceive the rule to be hostile to their national identity'.⁶

Jürgen Habermas has also attempted to move the 'nation-state' away from its liberal nationalist and homogenising moorings where the majority culture is hegemonic. Habermas is therefore attempting to expunge the ethnic element which goes to make up every liberal democracy together with civic elements. Liberal nationalism would be then replaced by 'constitutional patriotism' in a 'post-national' self understanding of the constitutional state. Habermas is, however, himself not entirely certain that this 'constitutional patriotism' will prove sufficient to bond society. Indeed, can a liberal political culture substitute for the cultural context of the homogenising nation? This is possible, Habermas believes, only if citizens possess social, cultural as well as civil rights. Social rights create bonds and lead to the 'pacification of class antagonisms' while globalisation would help in, 'saving the republican heritage by transcending the limits of the nation-state'.⁷ Habermas may though be too optimistic about the welfare state, which is under attack in many western liberal democracies. Will Kymlicka's major study of multiculturalism takes a different view to Habermas by criticising the traditional concept of the nation-state from a different perspective. Instead of arguing in favour of a more civic state where the ethnic element has almost but been marginalised or removed Kymlicka believes that culture and national identities are central and ideally suited to be

the primary foci of identification. Kymlicka believes that being part of a clearly defined and respected cultural group is a requirement for personal identity. Kymlicka, to his credit, opened up a debate where previously liberals had wanted to remain silent. Yet, as he shows, liberals prior to World War II had agitated in favour of national rights; in fact, he believed that minority rights are a legitimate component of the liberal tradition. The refusal to recognise group rights was a post-1945 departure for liberals.

Kymlicka clearly sees himself as part of the pre-1945 tradition of liberal thinkers who believed that an individual's personality and freedom was tied up with his/her membership of a national group. It is impossible, contrary to the wishes of many liberals, to separate the state from its ethnic components.⁸ Kymlicka points out that many liberalisers and supporters of democratisation have also been nationalists, such as in Quebec. Culture cannot be divorced from civic politics because it is an essential prop which provides additional meaning, facilitating their participation in a recognised community, a sense of belonging and mutual recognition.⁹ Culture 'is tied up with the way humans as cultural creatures need to make sense of their world ...' and therefore Kymlicka sees 'no reason to regret it'.¹⁰ Freedom and equality makes most sense to the majority of citizens within their own 'societal cultures', as defined by language, history, shared memories and values, common institutions, religious, economic and recreational life.

'Cultural membership provides us with an intelligent context of choice, and a secure sense of identity and belonging, that we call upon in confronting questions about personal values and projects'.¹¹

Kymlicka believes that by returning to its pre-1945 roots liberalism and individual rights can be reconciled within a democracy with collective, group rights. The two therefore do not have to conflict, the traditional view of post-1945 liberals who believe that for a democracy to function requires that all of its citizens are united by a common civic culture. Kymlicka's major criticism of the post-1945 liberal tradition was to correctly point out that a multinational state, within which he includes the majority of nation-states, can never be 'neutral' between its various national groups. The majority, or core/titular nation, was always privileged in certain ways through the choice of which language to utilise within schools, the courts and government services, which public holidays and historical myths to prioritise and how to draw, or re-draw internal boundaries. 'In any event', Kymlicka believes, 'the idea that the government could be neutral with respect to ethnic and national groups is'.¹²

Group rights for national minorities would promote equality between the majority and the minorities. Here Kymlicka is referring to a 'nation' as one which, 'means a historic community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and culture'.¹³ 'Nations' or 'peoples' therefore are carriers of cultures. As nearly all nation-states are not in fact ethnically homogenous they are actually multi-national states. Kymlicka's greatest contribution to the debate over multiculturalism is to argue in favour of collective rights for these national minorities while defining immigrants in a different manner. Voluntary immigrants do not exhibit Kymlicka's characteristics of a 'nation' or 'people' and therefore the expectation of their integration to the mainstream culture is not inconsistent with liberal principles. Multiculturalism accepted that the continued promotion of ethnic groups in the private domain was not inconsistent with the promotion of an overarching 'societal culture' in the public sphere. The exception to this rule are refugees who are involuntary immigrants.

Most states are not only multinational, due to the incorporation of smaller cultures who then become national minorities, but also polyethnic, due to the cultural diversity which has arisen as a consequence of the immigration of ethnic groups in favour of collective/group rights (for example, self government which allows for external protection) for minorities and financial support and legal protection for ethnic groups. Whereas the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have been willing to recognise polyethnic rights they have all, except for Canada, been unwilling to respect collective rights, arguing that they are 'immigrant countries'. This has merely served to promote a paternalistic racialism, genocide and discrimination against indigenous peoples.

The perils of multiculturalism

Multiculturalists place a strong emphasis upon the cultural component of identity, the loss of which harms the overall identities of citizens. Culture and national identities, however, are never static, but 'constantly fluctuating and metamorphosing', and rarely stable over time. Few cultural groups are separate and distinct while few individuals are totally in or outside cultural groups. Katherine Fierlbeck believes that group rights advocates must therefore show:

'that the cultural traits and values that one has by virtue of being born into a particular culture influence personal identity much more than would be non-cultural characteristics (such as physical traits or sexuality) or group affiliation formed as a mature individual. This cannot be simply assumed'.¹⁴

The basis for membership in political communities is grounded upon similarities – not differences. Political systems based upon cultural identities distinguish between 'us' and 'them'. Cultural identity requires that all individuals belong to a group and not hold cosmopolitan and amorphous identities. Katherine Fierlbeck argues that this emphasis upon cultural identity merely serves to reinforce marginality, encourage tribalism, prevent individuals from breaking free, discourages tolerance while not encouraging the formation of self-identity (which it is assumed can only exist within groups). Advocates of group rights have also to explain why a strong sense of identity can only arise within cultures and how this affords greater political tolerance based upon universal human rights.

The major critical response to multiculturalism has come from those who are concerned with the question of reconciling the diversity of society with homogenisation. Diversity, Stuart Hall advises us, is only attractive, 'within a shared framework which values the worth of the individual'.¹⁵ Even in developed societies, allegedly on the verge of the

'postmodern era' multiculturalism is seen as leading to disunity. It has been accused of impeding the full integration and acceptance of immigrants into the host country where individuals are seen first as ethnics and only secondly as, for example, Canadians. Neil Bissonath has therefore proposed as an alternative, 'reasonable diversity within vigorous unity'.¹⁶

It is not coincidental that in post-Soviet societies such as Ukraine leaders have attempted to adopt centrist policies which aim to unite the citizens of their new state at a time when the political community is still being forged. Multicultural diversity may also worsen – not improve – tolerance in such societies because it 'may heighten the sense of Otherness and arrogate the egalitarian perquisites of democracy to a majority group'.¹⁷ The 'We' would then degenerate into hostile ethnies where the link would be severed between cultural heritage and the state. In such an eventuality, 'The state becomes a soulless broker for stability while the individual trades the dignity of being a citizen for the right to represent a certain ethnic or confessional group'.¹⁸

In the 1970s and 1980s Australia and Canada dropped their 'melting pot' policies of assimilation in favour of the 'salad-bowl' of multiculturalism. Prior to the 1970s it had been assumed that immigrants and national minorities would assimilate and integrate into the dominant Anglo or Francophone cultures of Australia and Canada. It had been assumed that ethnic communities had comprised uniform groups not divided by class, social status or gender with their leaders authentic representatives of their communities. But in Australia multiculturalism never received the power and funding to seriously affect the impact of dominant groups and institutions. The Hawke government after 1986 was therefore able to relatively easily alter multiculturalism in favour of a greater stress again upon promoting an Australian identity and common, core values.¹⁹

By the late 1980s and the early 1990s both Australia and Canada had abandoned their multicultural experiments by intercultural policies. Multiculturalism always suffered from possessing a multiplicity of definitions although the core element rested upon the notion that there should exist equality of opportunity regardless of ethnicity. But in both countries multiculturalism was introduced alongside an existing mainstream culture. Clearly on the defensive by this time, supporters of multiculturalism introduced the concept of 'multiracialism' as a means of maintaining the primacy of group over individual rights where individuals would all be encouraged to declare their racial and/or ethnic stock. Problems though remained: 'Both traditions (of multiculturalism and multiracialism) are based on an overgeneralisation of isolated facts and are predicated on the primordality of ethnic and racial attachments'.²⁰ English had become the language adopted by most Australian and Canadian citizens, national minorities were socially mobile and not homogenous and tied across ethnic boundaries. In addition, the ancestry of individuals did not necessarily equate to membership of ethnic groups.²¹

Interculturalism, which had replaced multiculturalism in Australia and Canada by the early 1990s, aims to strike a balance between those advocating the maintenance and recognition of the multiethnic character of these societies while respecting their core values. In both countries individual rights have again come to be the primary foci over group rights. These new policies therefore sought to address the criticism that multiculturalism fostered disunity and damaged the civic nation.

By separating the private from the public domains states can still remain pluralistic while

avoiding the excesses of multiculturalism. Multicultural societies are distinguished, John Rex argues, by equality of opportunity, a rejection of the French assimilationist nation-state model, a single culture and set of individual rights in public coupled with a variety of cultures maintained within the private domain. Within the public domain the legal system, politics and economics are dominated by the common culture with some loyalties transferred from the private domain and regions to the state. National minority languages should not be subjected to assimilationary pressures and provided with equal opportunities.

This does not necessarily mean there will be no conflict between the private and the public domains, between the overall public culture and private ethnic and religious affiliations. National minorities are linked to their families and culture which represent another social system and are the primary vehicle for socialisation. Ultimately, a compromise has to be reached by all sides where a multicultural society, 'must find a place for both diversity and equality of opportunity'.²² By only emphasising the latter liberals are promoting assimilation into the dominant, majority culture. Therefore, both sides, Rex believes, should respect the single civic culture of the public domain and the diversity of the private.

Post-communism and multiculturalism

The question of the existence, or the necessity still for its creation, of a common civic culture and all-encompassing political community is of crucial importance when considering the former USSR. The fifteen countries of the former USSR, with the possible exception of the three Baltic states, are undergoing four transitions in the aftermath of the collapse of communism. The majority of them are not only undertaking democratisation and marketisation, as in central-eastern and earlier in southern Europe but also nation and state building. It is impossible to establish a democracy and a market economy in the absence of a state. Dankwart Rustow believes it is also impossible to establish a democracy in the absence of national unity, as defined by a political community, the citizens of which do not question its legitimacy.²³

In a major survey of the 27 post-communist states it found that those which were merely changing regime rather than forming new states with new boundaries were advantaged in the process of state building (Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and Romania plus maybe the three Baltic states). Russia, Serbia and the Czech Republic were also advantaged because they were successor states to former federations which inherited the infra structure of the former metropolis. States which drew upon a prior democratic tradition also had the best chances of establishing democracies earlier, as did those which were merely undergoing a transition from authoritarianism (central-eastern Europe) and not totalitarianism (the former USSR). In addition, 'those countries that first have to establish a single cohesive identity before going on to build the institutions of the state and inculcate civic virtues in the populace have the most problems' in the transition to democracies. In these states, 'the identity, pur borders of the new state first have to defined, producing contentious, divisive and of course time-consuming debate and even violence'.²⁴ Often much of the passion which in other states has gone into state building and democratisation has been consumed in the search for a national idea, language policies, defining the titular nation, or nations, obtaining legal recognition of inherited borders and accommodating national minorities.²⁵

The question of whether multiculturalism would help or hinder in creating political communities out of the Soviet successor states is a key criteria as to whether it should be

applied in these countries which are in the throes of state and nation building. Liberal criticism of multiculturalism, after all, is often premised upon the assumption that group rights inhibit the development of a shared identity necessary for a stable order, because multiculturalism encourages groups to focus upon differences – not shared purposes. Kymlicka admits himself that self government rights

‘do pose a serious threat to social unity, since they encourage the national minority to view itself as a separate people with inherent rights to govern themselves’.²⁶

Although these are valid criticisms not granting group rights or abolishing them can also be problematical. Multinational states cannot survive, Kymlicka argues correctly, ‘unless the various national groups have an allegiance to the larger political community they cohabit’.²⁷ Without providing self government for national minorities it will be difficult to obtain their loyalty to state patriotism and the emerging overarching societal culture required to ensure a stable political community.

The abolishing of the autonomous status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia and the refusal to grant autonomous status to the Trans-Dniester region of Moldova all sparked violent conflicts which are still unresolved. In contrast, Ukraine upgraded the status of the Crimea from that of an *oblast* to that of an autonomous republic which probably greatly contributed to a peaceful resolution of its dispute with Kyiv.²⁸ Dawisha found that of the 27 post-communist countries those which had been subjected to widespread civil or interstate violence lagged far behind in the transition to democracy (Armenia, Azerbaidzhan, Bosnia, Croatia, Georgia, Tajikistan, Serbia and Montenegro).²⁹ Therefore, the refusal to grant group rights or the attempt to take them away has impeded the democratisation process in seven post-communist countries.

Post-communist governments face a complex question. On the one hand, the refusal to grant or abolish group rights could precipitate violence and demands for secession. In Chechnia, the Trans-Dniester Republic, Nagorno Karabakh and Abkhaziof, and the hostility by the titular nationality towards, these autonomous regions only served to increase their demands for either separate states, confederation (in contrast to federation) or their annexation to neighbouring states (Souhazia to Russia, Nagorno Karabakh to Armenia).

On the other hand, by granting group rights social unity is damaged in newly emerging states where unity is already precarious. The Soviet successor states inherited dis-united polities, divided populations, no civic culture, regional loyalties and embryonic civil societies. Kymlicka admits that:

‘It seems unlikely that according self-government rights to a national minority can serve an integrative function. If citizenship is membership in a political community, then, in creating overlapping political communities, self government rights necessarily give rise to a sort of dual citizenship, and to potential conflicts about which common citizens identify with most deeply.’³⁰

In the Ukrainian case the Crimea is not as straight forward a matter as at first it may seem. There was a two-fold incentive to upgrade the Crimea from an *oblast* to that of an autonomous republic. Firstly, Crimean leaders threatened to petition the USSR Supreme Soviet to annul the 1954 decision to transfer the Crimea from the Russian SFSR to Ukraine, thereby returning the peninsula to Russian sovereignty. Secondly, any violence in

the Crimea would have inevitably escalated into a Russian-Ukrainian war which would have had disastrous consequences for European security and democratisation in both countries.³¹

Liberal support for group rights in regions such as the Crimea cannot ignore the limitations imposed upon a group's members in the name of group solidarity. The dominant ethnic Russian leadership of the Crimea should be criticised for limiting the national rights of Ukrainians and Tatars to have education and media in their own tongue. In addition, 'We should not establish a system which enables the majority to profit from their own injustices'.³² The majority ethnic Russian community in the Crimea are mainly post-war immigrants who replaced the Tatars. To rectify a previous injustice (the 1944 ethnic cleansing of the Tatars from the Crimea) may require the transformation of the Crimea back into a Tatar autonomous republic. There are many examples within the Russian Federation and Georgia (for example, Abkhazia) where the national minority is itself a minority within its designated autonomous republic (Tatars only account for 300,000 of the Crimea's two and a half million population). Yet, Kymlicka argues that, 'Federalism can only serve as a mechanism for self government if the national minority forms a majority in one of the federal sub units, as the Quebecois do in Quebec'.³³ Ideally, it is preferable for the national minority to be in a majority but this is not always the case and should not be used as a pretext for refusing group rights. The Abkhaz were only a minority within their autonomous republic when the USSR existed but are now the majority after they expelled the Georgians during their brutal secessionist campaign in 1993. In the USA there were national minorities (Navaho Indians, Chicanos, the native peoples of Hawaii) which when incorporated were majorities in their homeland and could have been granted group rights. But group rights were refused after these regions were swamped by Anglophone settlers. This policy is being implemented by China in Sinkiang and Tibet in an attempt at turning the local indigenous peoples (Uighurs and the Tibetans respectively) into minorities within their own autonomous regions by promoting the influx of Han Chinese settlers.

Kymlicka makes a distinction between colonists and immigrants. The first settlers in the USA and Canada, for example, were the colonial vanguard. Immigrants came later into societies created by the colonial settlers. But when do colonial settlers become 'indigenous'? In Ulster the Protestant community is largely composed of Scottish and English colonial settlers but, after centuries of living in northern Ireland they claim the title of an indigenous people. In the former USSR, Soviet nationality policies deliberately fostered the in-migration of ethnic Russians into the non-Russian republics in an attempt to ensure central political control and russify the local populations. Industrialisation and urbanisation in Estonia, Latvia, Moldova, Kazakstan and Ukraine led to the deliberate influx of large numbers of ethnic Russians. By 1989, the last Soviet census, ethnic Russians accounted for 30.3, 34, 13, 37.8 and 22.1 per cent of the population of these five states respectively. Are they therefore 'indigenous' peoples or colonial settlers?

Most immigrants choose to leave their cultures voluntarily. Ethnic Russians were sent to these non-Russian republics where they usually obtained various forms of privileges. Few of them bothered to learn the local language as Russian was of the former USSR.

Ukrainians sent to the Russian SFSR, where they are the second largest national minority after the Tatars, did not obtain the same privileges and they were subjected to russification. As these Ukrainians are regarded as 'immigrants', not as a 'national minority', they are not

provided with group rights and thereby encouraged to assimilate.

In making his distinction between national minorities and voluntary immigrants Kymlicka believes that the latter, 'in deciding to uproot themselves, immigrants voluntarily relinquish some of the rights that go along with their original national membership'.³⁴ Although they should be afforded polyethnic rights they cannot demand group rights because they do not fit Kymlicka's definition of a 'nation' or 'people'. It is perfectly reasonable, Kymlicka therefore believes for the country to promote the integration of these immigrants, even though they originally came as colonial settlers. Ethnic Russian settlers in Ukraine have only been provided with group rights in the Crimea, where they form a majority in a specific area which has always had a tenuous link to Ukraine. Elsewhere in Ukraine ethnic Russians have not been provided with group rights, in a similar manner to ethnic Ukrainians in the Russian Federation. Although polyethnic rights are increasingly being provided for both ethnic Ukrainians in Russia and ethnic Russians in Ukraine both states will still attempt to encourage their integration into the mainstream culture which is emerging in both countries through their state and nation building policies. Integration, particularly after a number of generations and within such close cultures and similar languages, will inevitably lead to some assimilation of ethnic Ukrainians in Russia and ethnic Russians in Ukraine.

Both sides (the mainstream society and the immigrants) should adapt to the society. The mainstream society will devise nationality policies which cater for the polyethnic needs of its non-titular ethnic groups. In Ukraine self governing rights have been granted to Hungarians and Romanians who live compactly in the Trans-Carpathian and Chernivtsi *oblasts* respectively. The Crimea was upgraded from an *oblast* to that of an autonomous republic (although not the Tatar autonomous republic that 944). National minorities have been strongly encouraged by the state to revive their languages and cultures which had largely been russified (for example, Poles, Bulgarians and Jews). Ethnic Russians are catered for by a state programme introduced in late 1994, the continued re-transmission of television from Russia and the widespread availability of Russian-language books and media.³⁵

All cultures are enriched by interaction with other cultures, something which is being assisted by globalisation which is breaking down state borders. This interaction should only be condemned if it is, 'conducted in circumstances of serious inequalities in power'.³⁶ In the non-Russian successor states of the former USSR such inequalities existed when they became independent states. Ethnic Russians often dominated culture, politics and economics in these republics. The Kazakhstan riots of 1986 were sparked by Moscow sending an ethnic Russian to lead the republic.³⁷ By the late 1980s in the Ukraine ethnic Ukrainians outnumbered ethnic Russians in only two professions – agriculture and forestry. This internal colonialism was patently unjust and should be criticised from a liberal standpoint. After the former Soviet non-Russian republics became independent states the titular nationalities attempted to reclaim back some of the political, cultural and economic positions of power from ethnic Russians in an attempt at redressing some of these abuses of Soviet internal colonialism.

Ethnic Russians are resisting being labelled as an 'ethnic group' or 'national minority' in the non-Russian successor states of the former USSR. Belarus and Ukraine were never regarded as separate ethnic groups by the majority of Russians, only as regional branches of the *Rus'kiy narod*.³⁸ Therefore, ethnic Russia defined as another founding or titular

nation – not as merely another ‘national minority’. (Canada is defined as a country with two founding nations – the English/British and the French.) Kymlicka warns us that even in Western democracies, ‘not all groups fall neatly into either the ‘national minority’ or ‘ethnic group’ category...’³⁹ Belarus under President Lukashenka has accepted the ethnic Russian argument that it is a regional branch of the *Rus’kiy narod* and Russians and Belarusians are therefore both founding and titular nations. In Ukraine, where state and nation building have not been halted, as in Belarus, the June 1996 constitution defined Ukrainians as the sole founding/titular nation and Russians as a ‘national minority’.

These problems are particularly true in culture where the Russian language had previously been privileged. The provision of affirmative action to non-Russian languages and cultures was inevitable after decades of russification and pressures to assimilate which will though inevitably lead to a decline in Russian-language schools. At the same time, by insisting that immigrants acquire a command of the ‘state language’ (English in north America, Ukrainian or Estonian in the Ukraine or Estonia) does not mean that they have to abandon their mother tongue. These former colonial settlers/immigrants may therefore become bilingual, particularly in countries such as Ukraine where the local language is similar and bilingualism was already widespread. Affirmative action should only be condemned if its aim is to nationalise the state for the titular nationality while ignoring the provision of polyethnic rights for other ethnic groups.

To make Russian the second ‘state language’, together with the titular, may seem to be in line with liberal policy. But the continued dominance of the Russian language in many non-Russian successor states means that this would not promote equality. In Belarus although Russian was elevated to the status of a second state language in the May 1995 referendum this has not made Belarusian and Russian equal languages. Belarus was the most de-nationalised of the non-Russian successor states and its language subjected to the greatest degree of russification. The Belarusian language is not able to compete with the Russian, something which President Alyaksandr Lukashenka understood perfectly well when he introduced the referendum because he openly derides the Belarusian language. Therefore, the titular languages of the non-Russian successor states can only hope to compete with the Russian language after a period of affirmative action in their favour by granting them exclusivity as the only state language. By making Ukrainian as the only state language its prestige is rising in line with its every day use in state institutions. This is backed by Kymlicka who believes:

‘In fact, it is very difficult for languages to survive in modern industrial societies unless they are used in public life. Given the spread of standardized education, the high demand for literacy in work, and widespread interaction with government agencies, any language which is not a public language becomes so marginalised that it is likely to survive only amongst a small élite, or in a ritualized form, not as a living and developed language underlying a flourishing culture’.⁴⁰

By making Russian a second state language President Lukashenka therefore passed the death sentence on the Belarusian language with the active support of the Russian state which has signed an act of union with Belarus. In the late 1980s Dmytro Pavlychko warned that if soviet nationality policies continued the Ukrainian language would be only spoken in Canada. This depressing prediction has though not come to pass. But will this prophecy become true for Belarusian which may become only spoken in the USA where

the exiled leadership of the Popular Front now reside? In such a situation Kymlicka is absolutely correct in arguing that if a culture is 'threatened with debasement or decay, we must act to protect it'.⁴¹ We should also condemn Russian liberals for supporting their geopolitical interests in backing the Lukashenka regime, thereby indirectly supporting the continued russification of Belarus and the denial of group rights to Belarusians.

Should language groups be granted certain privileges in the crafting of multicultural policies? This is sometimes argued by Western authors and the Russian government when seeking to defend Russian speakers, in contrast to the smaller number of ethnic Russians, in the non-Russian successor states of the former USSR.⁴² Louise Jackson & Kataryna Wolczuk believe that a provision should have been included within the June 1996 constitution for Russian speakers.⁴³ But Kymlicka cautions us against this the difficulty in defining such amorphous groups. In the United States the term 'Hispanics' should be therefore used with caution because they identify first and foremost with their national identity (for example, Guatemalans). The term 'Hispanics' is therefore, 'little more than a statistical category covering a range of minorities, immigrants, and exiles, all with their own distinct identities and demands'.⁴⁴ In Canada the Francophones are different in that they refer to people of French Canadian identity in a state which recognises two 'state languages' (English and French). Immigrants, in contrast to the two founding colonial settler nations (the British and French) and national minorities (the Native Indians), are not granted language rights.

A major aspect of the affirmative action introduced by the non-Russian successor states of the former USSR was the widely felt need to regain self respect. In Ukraine, for example, the Ukrainian language was derided in the Soviet era as that of a peasant, uncouth language not fit for use in high politics, state institutions or economics. When speaking in the Ukrainian language in the Soviet era Ukrainians would be sometimes told to 'Speak to me in a Human Tongue' (that is, in Russian). If there is no self respect, as seen by Ukrainians *vis-à-vis* their language and culture, individuals lose their self identity, which is closely tied to cultural identity. This was, after all, what Soviet nationalities policy intended – to turn the Soviet population into a Russian-speaking *Homo Sovieticus*. A peoples self respect is bound up with the esteem in which a national group is held: 'If a culture is not generally respected, then the dignity and self-respect of its members will also be threatened', Kymlicka advises us.⁴⁵

David Miller opposes the granting of group rights because this only serves to undermine any overarching identity. National minorities should be therefore assimilated because democratic polities require a single culture. If they resist assimilation then they should be allowed to secede.⁴⁶ But few national groups have voluntarily agreed to assimilate into the majority culture and such a policy therefore requires a certain amount of coercion and maybe even violence which could undermine the democratic polity. In addition, few states have voluntarily agreed to the secession of national minorities – only two new states have been created since 1945 by secessionist movements (Bangladesh and Eritrea. Chechnia may become a third). Secession is also not always viable and could lead to conflicting claims over the borders of the seceding unit and resources. Native Indians in Quebec voted unanimously against secession of the province from Canada in the 1996 referendum and have warned that if Quebec secedes they would claim upwards of two thirds of its territory. The United Nations has only agreed to the self determination of former colonies, not national minorities. Yet, many of these national minorities may have been subject to the

same sort of colonisation and conquest as the former colonies.⁴⁷

Liberals have also never been at ease with the ethnic or cultural fraternity of civic nations and political communities. Common citizenship and an emphasis upon individual, in contrast to group, rights would help promote a shared identity and destiny. Social unity is dependant upon shared values and a shared identity (common history, language and/or religion). Polyethnic rights can promote integration and inclusion of different ethnic groups into the political community by removing the fear of assimilation. If there is no respect for 'deep diversity' and an unwillingness to compromise on both sides by the majority and minority cultures it will be difficult to inculcate a shared identity and values. Kymlicka believes that, 'People from different national groups will only share an allegiance to the larger polity if they see it as the context within which their national identity is nurtured, rather than subordinated'.⁴⁸ A major problem in applying multicultural policies to the former USSR rests upon two factors. Firstly, multicultural policies can only be applied to national minorities and ethnic groups who have a cultural identity. How would such policies therefore cope with individuals who have a confused or lack any identity? Can multicultural policies be applied to those who define themselves as 'Soviet' or whose primary loyalty is to their region, not the state.⁴⁹ This is true of large numbers of Ukrainian and Belarusian citizens who cannot be therefore expected to act or vote as members of 'communities'.⁵⁰

Multicultural policies therefore assume that individuals hold an allegiance to a culture and hold an identity. Russian speakers do not exist as a cultural group or 'community of interest'; that is, Russophones are an amalgam of russified Belarusians and others. Yet, at the time of the disintegration of the former USSR the majority of those who defined themselves as 'Ukrainian' or 'Russian' once every ten years in the Soviet census did not hold what we understand to be modern national identities. Their pre-modern identity is therefore still in a great deal of flux – as it was in all successor states of former empires. In addition the Soviet census forced respondents to choose the nationality of only one parent when in Ukraine, for example, a quarter of families had spouses of different nationalities. 58.9 per cent of Russians and 74.7 per cent of Jews in Ukraine married outside their ethnic group in the Soviet era. Because Russian was the language of advancement many of those with mixed ancestry chose 'Russian' as their ethnic identity recorded in their passports and during censuses.

In the Ukraine the 1989 Soviet census gave Russians and Ukrainians as accounting for 22.1 and 72 per cent respectively of the population. By the mid 1990s the number of ethnic Russians had declined by half to only 10.8 per cent while the number of Ukrainians had also slightly declined to 66.5 per cent. These two declines led to the emergence of a third group of mixed Ukrainian/Russian identity (15.8 per cent). One factor which explains this ethnic reidentification is the higher birth rate among Ukrainians, who dominate rural areas where the birth rates are higher (87.5 per cent of Russians live in urban areas compared to 60.3 per cent of Ukrainians). Nevertheless, the major cause of the decline in 'Russians' in Ukraine was due to their ethnic re-identification as 'Ukrainians', presumably because in an independent Ukraine it is more advantageous to be 'Ukrainian', unlike in the former USSR. Most self-declared Ukrainians have parents of the same nationality while approximately half of the self declared Russians are of Ukrainian-Russian ancestry. Many of these self declared Russians of mixed parentage are now re-identifying themselves as 'Ukrainian'.⁵¹ The application of multicultural policies in such an environment may be

impossible or, at the very best, difficult until those holding amorphous, regional or Soviet identities replace them with cultures that Kymlicka defines as exhibiting the criteria of 'nations' or 'peoples'.

Conclusions

Kymlicka cautions us that, 'There are no simple answers or magic formulas to resolve all these questions'.⁵² The provision of group rights is a sensible, just and liberal approach to dealing with national minorities. In the absence of such policies violence and civil war may lead to the national minority increasing its demand from mere federal autonomy to that of confederation or even a separate state. Ukraine successfully contained Crimean demands for recognition as a distinct entity (it is the only administrative region of Ukraine with a non-Ukrainian majority) by upgrading the *oblast* into an autonomous republic, preventing violence and, in the end, ending the threat of separatism. In contrast, the abolition autonomous status (Abkhazia), the refusal to grant group rights (the Trans-Dniester region) or the promotion of ethnic violence (Nagorno Karabakh) merely ended up in damaging the transition to democracy, civil war and the loss of central control over the rebellious area in Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaidzhan.

But the provision of group and polyethnic rights can be also damaging to social unity and the creation of a political community. All of the Soviet successor states are undergoing state and nation building. Russia, like Kemal Ataturk's Turkey in the 1920s, is redefining its identity from that of an imperial nation to that of a new civic nation within borders that had never existed before in history. The search for unity is a common theme running throughout many of the nationality policies applied since 1992 in the Soviet successor states. It is therefore understandable that they are promoting loyalty and allegiance to the newly emerging political communities. But non-titular ethnic groups and national minorities will only transfer their loyalty in the public domain to the newly emerging political community if they are allowed to foster their cultures and identities in the private sphere.

Footnotes

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