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## **Antagonistic Cultures or Global Stratification? Lessons of History and Social Analysis: The Causes of Tensions in Multicultural Societies**

Antagonistyczne kultury czy globalne rozwarstwienie?  
Przyczyny napięć w społeczeństwach wielokulturowych  
na podstawie nauk historii i analiz społecznych

### Streszczenie

Jeśli spojrzymy na historię i dziedzictwo wielkich cywilizacji, obserwujemy, że zawsze mieliśmy do czynienia z cywilizacjami, które określilibyśmy dziś jako »wielokulturowe«, choć takie pojęcie z kolei wówczas nie istniało. Przykłady Mezopotamii, Persji, państw hellenistycznych, starożytnego Rzymu w okresie szczytu jego potęgi, imperiów arabsko-muzułmańskich w wiekach średnich, Chin dynastii Mongołów – Yuanów, Indii Mogołów, Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów, Związku Radzieckiego czy USA, oto parę wybranych przykładów państw, które wywierały, niezależnie od naszych opinii wobec ich ustrojów, wobec ich zasad założycielskich, wobec ich religii, wobec ich ideologii, wobec ich metod rządzenia, silny wpływ na rozwój kultury ludzkiej, na rozwój sztuki, a także na postęp koncepcji politycznych, społecznych, ideologicznych, teologicznych, prawnych, ekonomicznych, naukowych itp. We wszystkich tych państwach, przynajmniej w okresie ich rozkwitu, ważne funkcje polityczne, ekonomiczne, kulturalne, naukowe czy ideologiczne zajmowali ludzie różnych narodowości bądź różnej przynależności ideowej. Należy jeszcze podkreślić przykład stolicy imperium osmańskiego, Konstantynopola, który był masowo zamieszkały do połowy XIX w. przez chrześcijan i żydów, chociaż państwo to było pod władzą mużułmańskiego sułtana, co nie przeszkodziło zresztą, żeby stolica tego imperium była jednocześnie stolicą duchową uniwersalistycznego w swych założeniach chrześcijańskiego patriarchatu prawosławnego. Możemy więc stwierdzić na podstawie tych kilku przykładów wybranych spośród wielu innych możliwych, że synteza i współzawodnictwo kultur stanowią nieodłączną część składową, a także warunek dynamicznego rozwoju kultury ogólnoludzkiej.

Słowa kluczowe: Europa, islam, kryzys, orientalizm, Zachód

## Abstract

When we observe the history and heritage of great civilizations, we notice that we had almost always to do with civilizations we can define as “multicultural”, even if such a concept did not exist in those times. Mesopotamia, Persia, Hellenistic States, and ancient Rome at the time of their splendour, Arab-Muslim empires during the Middle Ages, Mongol-Yuan Chinese empire, of Mongol Indies, Polish-Lithuanian-Ruthenian “Republic of the Two Nations”, Soviet Union, United States – those are some examples of states and civilizations that, not taking into account our own opinions and feelings concerning their political regime or legitimacy, managed to have a strong influence on the development of human culture, art and political, social, ideological, theological, economical, scientific or legal culture. In all of those states, at least at the time of the peak of their civilization, people from different nationalities (ethnicities) and/or religions held leading political, economical, cultural, scientific or ideological positions. We can also give the example of the capital city of the Ottoman “Muslim” and “Turkish” empire, Constantinople,<sup>1</sup> where until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Christians and Jews counted for almost half of the population (Roou, 2015). This State was submitted to a Muslim Sultan but his capital was also the Seat of the spiritual leader of the Universal Christian Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. We can then consider, on the base of these few examples found among numerous other ones we could also have found, that symbiosis and emulation of cultures constitute the basic element and requirement for the dynamic development of human cultures.

Keywords: Europe, Islam, crisis, orientalism, West

## Dynamic synthesis of cultures

We prefer to introduce the dynamic concept of “cultural synthesis” than the more static one of “multiculturalism” since we consider that during periods of great human leaps forward and of progress of civilizations and social regimes we almost always had to deal with a common unified ideology (or religious ideology) and a common social (class) substructure where very different cultural elements could be integrated within some kind of political, social and economical melting pot. A “multicultural” diversity of cultural background and visual cultures under a political and social “unicultural” structure. To counter the concept that is very widespread in the Anglo-saxon world, we can observe that in so called “multicultural” society there are no supposedly equally treated multiple cultures but rather we have to deal with purely apparent cultures arranged side by side and existing under a unified political and economical culture accepting purely secondary external differences. We have then to deal with a more or less paternalistic form of inequality that historically produced “Indian reservations”, “hard” or “soft” forms of apartheid or a in fact monocultural melting pot with just a superficial ethnical or religious “touch”. We can also notice that in the case of the French post-revolutionary, colonial or post-colonial concepts promoting a supposedly strictly unified and egalitarian “republican”, “secularized” common culture, we have to do with

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<sup>1</sup> Which kept officially its Roman name under the Muslim Sultans, changed to Istanbul only in 1930, at the time of the secularized and nationalistic Turkish Republic.

unequally mixed elements taking their roots, even if under a non-religious form, from the days of the “purely” Catholic and Gallican Kingdom of France. There is then no real basic social difference between the in fact colonial English model of “diversity” and the French model of “unity”, between superficial multiculturalism and superficial monoculturalism, since in both cases we have to deal with a privileged social and national core group. Even if, at the end of the day, these groups play a progressive role during the peak of their historical development, giving to “peripheral” groups the possibility to take an active part in the construction of their “empire”.

These examples of dynamically developed State powers are then integrating very different elements with very different basic political, economical, social cultures and with very different forms of primary identities but fundamentally melted on the grounds of the stronger social and political core structure. In these cases, the only accepted, well received or tolerated “foreign” or even “indigenous” elements originating from popular local classes aggregated in the cultural, social, ethnical, religious or ideological core culture are the ones that can entirely fit within the basic class structure of the system.

Historical experience proved that – in the case of Pagan ancient civilizations as well as in the case of Christian or Islamic ones, in the case of Mediterranean or non Mediterranean cultural circles, in the case of modernistic liberal or more or less authoritarian socialist regimes – we did not observe strong ethnical or religious tensions as long as each one of these social structures was able to show such an elasticity and efficiency that guaranteed some economical development for all and some forms of cultural or social promotion to broad masses. That explains the progress of the official state language against local ones, Greek, Latin, Arabic, Turkish, English, French, German, Russian, etc. Progress that could begin to step back at the time of decadency of the empire. The progression of the core “monoculture” and language, together with the assimilation of “peripheral” ones, functions up to the moment when a given political regime, regardless of its ideological, religious or repressive limitations, brings to a larger part of the society a more credible economical, social and cultural perspectives than hopelessness.

## The sources of the crisis of contemporary “multiculturalism”

The crisis we observe nowadays concerning identity issues seems, at least for the Western or Arab States linked with Western powers<sup>2</sup>, to have its main roots in their struc-

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2 We can observe that the Muslim intellectual or economical creativeness is still globally very limited and characterized by a situation of stagnation dating back to its last historical stage of decadency, but simultaneously we have to take into account the fact that the level of social and political crisis we can observe is much more acute in the Arab countries located in close neighbourhood of Europe than in such Muslim countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Central Asia, etc. What this seems to mean is that the contemporary Arab world crisis is also linked to the crisis of the West, whereas other Muslim countries are part of the process of development of the nowadays much more dynamic Eastern Asia.

tural, social and economical crisis. A situation quite frequent in the human history. Even if it takes on a cultural, a national or an ethnical shape, crisis corresponds basically to a situation where leading elites are no longer able to find answers to most of the social issues they are confronted with. In their interest is then to hide, as much as possible, the profound causes of tensions and contradictions developing within the existing social structure and “cultural differences” can be easily used to achieve this goal. This is due to the fact that, at a certain historical stage, the leading elites speaking on the behalf of a given social, ideological, religious or national formation, with most often the silent approval of passive, to a certain extent, masses of “believers”, are no longer able to “run to the front” with a creative programme of absolutely necessary transformations of their own mental structures which reached the stage of structural blockade.

We shall present here some examples taken from history that will help us to understand the thesis we are trying to promote: first Arabic-Muslim States, ancient Poland, USSR and USA.

The really stunning development of the first Islamic State of Medina, from the Atlantic coast up to the foot of the Himalaya, was possible because people living in the old Byzantine and Persian empires were enduring, with increasing discontent, the burden of taxes and endless wars carried out by those States at the very same time when a lot of religious “heresies” were repressed and when “peripheral” provinces like Syria or Egypt had less and less influence over central decisions (Buresi, 2003; Chagnon, 2008; Chrétiens et musulmans..., 2003). The proportion of dissatisfied people to the ones able to accept the dominant rules was so high that it provoked a massive feeling of both social and “identity” exclusion. Muslim armies brought to all these newly conquered countries a completely new vision of monotheism, of rationality, and brand new economical and social responses. They unified the tax system within the new State that was giving legal protection to all subjects, what was very important to members of up till then oppressed religious, social and economical groups. Even if the first ruling dynasty of the Ummayyads did not manage to respect a complete equality between Arabs and non-Arabs, a new dynasty of Abbasids managed to overthrow them and created a new regime able to take into account the potential of not only Arabic and Semitic peoples, but also of the Persian and Turkic peoples; and not only the potential open by the Islamic cultural wave, but also the one coming from Christian or Jewish scholars. All this gave a strong stimulus to the Islamic culture for the next centuries (Blankinship, 1994). Up to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when Arabic-Muslim cultural and religious societies entered the stage of fossilization and were then rejected by the wheel of dynamic universal history.

In the Polish-Lithuanian-Ruthenian Commonwealth, we also had to deal with a system accepting, consciously or not, quite the same system of religious cohabitation as the one developed in the first existing Muslim States, on the basis of the Medina “Magna Carta”. This system was able to function in Poland not only because of its religious tolerance toward its subjects and elites, but also because the country was

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See B. Drwęski. *Islam: le point de jonction Tiers monde – Occident – puissances émergentes*. Available at: <http://www.academiegeopolitiquedeparis.com/images/Geo44/8drewski.pdf> (01.10.2015).

sufficiently rich due to the production and export of cereals that allowed to feed all its inhabitants, to give to the nobles the possibility to enjoy freedom and wealth, and to take control of the political power within the frame of a “noble democracy”, to grant to the Muslim Tatars the possibility to have a career in the army and to allow the bourgeois, Jews and Armenians to get rich and be relatively free. As long as this situation prevailed, even the peasants were able to accept the development of the system of serfdom that was giving them the guarantee of remaining fed and secure.

This does not mean that the old Poland was free from social tensions between traders and landowners, between bourgeois and Jews, between Orthodox peasants and Catholic nobles, etc. But until the Cossack uprising of 1648, a Cossack could believe he will be able to obtain, within the frame of the existing system, the status of free soldier and eventually become a noble; a Ruthenian could believe that the area around Kiev province will obtain the same status as the Great Duchy of Lithuania; each peasant could have faith that he will finally find his ideal “Good Lord”. All those hopes vanished during the “Polish Deluge” when local Cossack insurgents and foreign invaders destroyed the whole country, even if the Polish King Jan Kazimierz managed to recover his throne and tried unsuccessfully to rebuild the faith for a reformed Commonwealth. It was the last moment of real victories of the Polish army over foreign state powers, fighting with the help of peasant resistance.

Years after the hope awakened on the wave of the Russian October Revolution, Soviet Union became a state less and less tolerant toward the languages of its “peripheral republics” compared to the times of the so called “korenization” (putting down roots) of the twenties, it also adopted a much less tolerant state policy toward Islam than the one launched at the time of Sultan Galiev, when Lenin forced the Bolsheviks to accept the right to Sharia tribunals, Muslim scarf and Koranic schools (Drwęski, 2014, pp. 50–63). But, in spite of those developments creating some dissatisfaction, Soviet State passed the test of the Second World War and did not collapse under the blows of Hitler’s Germany because the majority of its citizens of different national origins and faiths still believed that this state, under the leadership of Georgian, Russian, Armenian or Kazakh leaders, was creating the possibility for promotion of culture, education, social mobility and economical progress for all its citizens.

At the same time in the United States of America, the “Red Indians” were living in impoverished and isolated reservations, Black people were submitted to segregation and were under the constant threat of lynchings; but this was not enough to weaken the belief that this country was the one of endless opportunities, of Hollywood movies creating the “American dream” where a peanut merchant was supposedly able to get into the White House of the “strongest democracy of the world”.

The strength of the so-called multiculturalism lies not in the fact that every culture has equal rights to develop its own visual specificities in a certain country at a certain time but it is mainly rooted in the fact that the majority of its inhabitants within the frames of very different social and political systems, are convinced that they have a guarantee of the minimum standard of living corresponding to the actual stage of international development and that their origin, their faith, their ideology, their nationality does not create an impassable barrier for their individual or social security and the one of their own children.

When the Christian or the Jewish resident of the “Turkish” Constantinople became convinced that the Ottoman empire was in fact a state only made for Muslims, he then chose to become more and more “Greek”. When the Syrian inhabitant of the same empire, whether Muslim or Christian, became aware that social promotion was favouring the Turks, he then became an “Arab”. When the Ruthenian Greek Catholic peasant of Eastern Galicia discovered that jobs in the Galician and later Polish State post office are in fact reserved for Roman Catholics, he then became consciously “Ukrainian”. When the Soviet citizen living in Moscow thought that he is financing without limits the development of Georgia or Uzbekistan, then he became again more and more “Russian”, at the very same time when the Lithuanian or Armenian Soviet citizen came to believe in the same “ethnocentric” understanding around its own Republic. And the multicultural Soviet Union with all its national dance ensembles began to vanish. People who massively emigrate from their homeland also, are convinced that the enormous pain linked with this decision constitutes the only way to flee poverty, war, oppression or lack of perspectives for themselves or their children. And this is also a failure of “multiculturalism”. The actual crisis of “multiculturalism” seems then to be linked to the much more profound crisis of the global economic and political system and with social tensions taking their roots in this situation, rather than to conflicts of cultures or civilizations at the time when all of them have been often reduced to the level of producers of certain goods. The example of so-called “Islamism” seems much more linked to the despair of nations, especially young “lumpenproletarians” living at the periphery of developed Western countries and at the same time observing the destruction of the last forms of their old culture under economical globalisation, than to the fact that they are really aware of the values that the real Muslim civilization had at the time of its glory.

## Causes of the phenomenon of the decline of tolerance

The issues with which Western “post-modern” societies are now confronted are very similar to the ones we described above: Is the German shopkeeper financing Greece without any limits? Is the Catalonian office employee not financing Andalusia? Is the American tax payer financing with no end NATO structures or social services? Is the no longer moderately wealthy, threatened by unemployment and/or unable to pay his debts middle class French citizen not financing the limitless migrants coming from countries that his “own” military air force bomb? Et cetera.

In the globalized market we are all living in, we can no longer avoid asking the question if there is a real, fundamental difference between the world view (*Weltanschauung*) presented by, for example, the religious discourse of a Fox News TV televangelist and the one carried on by a Telefatawist TV station in the Oil Gulf States. Is there any difference between the pogroms of Burmese or Sri Lankan Muslims launched by Buddhist fundamentalists and the assassination of Yezidis carried on by ISIS/IS in Iraq? Is the fate of Palestinian refugees threatened by Israeli settlers in the West Bank very different than the situation of South African Blacks ousted from their land at the time



of apartheid? Et cetera. Is there, in each of these cases, a basically different “cultural” situation or what we have here are the same, basically identical social and economical policies based on the very same political culture? Are we dealing with some “clashes of civilizations” that could be solved by nice “multicultural” attitudes or rather a basically identical modernistic social and political structures tending to create social contradictions and tensions for other reasons than a different cultural “look”, a different appearance, a different “cultural touch”? Is there any basic difference between, let’s say, the Saudi and the WASP shareholder of the same transnational corporation, between the TV Neo-Evangelical reverend and the “Islamist” preacher, between a Syrian migrant, a Greek emigrant and a French unemployed? Do we have to concentrate first on the causes of tensions coming from the differences of cultures existing in the globalized world – Western, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian – or do basic differences are mostly linked to ideologies and social interests – socialist, neoconservative, neoliberal, etc.? Maybe it is still possible nowadays to enclose the way each society understands common and global social issues in the cultural discourse each of them is more accustomed to hear. The basic question we have to ask can be linked to different forms and different interpretations we can notice within all existing political and ideological trends and world views which are each in fact internally divided on such issues like social goals, class points of view, philosophical interpretations of their own heritage connected to general evolution of the whole world and its global structures. In a situation where all existing religions, all existing ideologies, almost all existing nations and states already experienced in their own history moments of development, peak and decay, the basic challenge for all cultures and for the concept of multicultural cohabitation lays within the capacity of each human trend to confront the creative elements that existed and exist in each of them with the ones that were used to justify laziness, passiveness and regression. Every living organism, both individual or collective, has experienced moments of dynamism and moments of regress and ossification. It is only at the times of ossification that the cohabitation of different cultures and world views is really threatened. This fact is connected to a social crisis that cannot be understood within cultural discourses that are ossified and maladjusted to the surrounding reality. This is basically linked to the social structure existing at any given time. The spirit of emulation and mutual respect – which constitutes to be the base of every stable social consensus and equilibrium – has to be clearly distinguished from the competitive Darwinian view based on the logic “either my ethnical group or they...”.

## Mechanism for dynamic societies

Our reflection is based on the fact that societies are developing dynamically within a dialectical process characterized by a constant mechanism of either emulation under a “win-win” philosophy or competition under a “either-or” philosophy, both on individual and collective levels. On collective level, this mechanism can be observed between social or cultural groups, most frequently between socio-cultural groups. This mechanism can give birth to very creative moments in human history when some form

of balance, social and structural coherence is achieved. At the very same time, we notice existence of different cultural components within this structure, which is possible because of a certain degree of tolerance toward different faiths, different ethnic groups, different world views. We also have here a leading group, or a leading class, that is able to give new perspectives of progress to majority of their countrymen. Eventually, when the state is powerful enough, other countries can be tempted to join or at least come closer to the leading power and its culture.

This means that multicultural societies can be dynamic only when there is a common political, social, economical and cultural ground. We must then be very careful to properly to define the concepts of “culture” and “multiculturalism”: a social, economical or political common behaviour under a united social, political and economical structure with different ethnical or religious forms. That excludes basically different social, economical or political principles, values and structures – taking, most of the time, different ethnical, national, ideological or religious forms. Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, socialism, neoliberalism, neoconservatism, etc. can all function in a “multicultural” society when their leading group accepts common social and economical objectives, which can be found in most religious or ideological traditions. But each ideological trend rejects, for very logical reasons, any coexistence of different social objectives, whatever is their cultural appearance. If we are basing our Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, socialist, liberal, etc. “values” on those elements of their historical development that are contradictory to the ones chosen from other trends, then such a multiculturalism is impossible. When, for example, a Muslim (or a traditionalist pre-Calvinist Christian) considers that usury has to be forbidden in the society he wants to live in, or when a socialist excludes the possibility of private ownership, then it is impossible for his “culture” to coexist with the nowadays dominant neoliberal culture. But a Saudi prince who is a Carlyle Group shareholder, under his very “strict” interpretation of Islam, has no problem with the global banking system and he will quite easily fit in the American way of life when he goes to the USA, even if all his wives are wearing scarves and even if he does not eat pork. He will never create a “cultural problem” in his second country as do migrants who are willing to introduce themselves in a overpopulated work market where competition, and then frustration, rules. This example shows us that when we use the term “culture”, we have to be careful to distinguish what is superficial within a culture from what tends to be considered at a certain moment as basic for this culture. It was for example easier for a Wahabi Saudi prince to live in the liberal London than to live in socialist and still Muslim Egypt at the time of Nasser. Because Nasser understood Islamic values in a socialist way, which was in opposition to the Islamic interpretation dominant in Saudi Arabia. We have then to discover the differences coming from social traditions legitimized by religion or ideology and social contradictions existing within all religions or ideologies. If we think of “culture” in a dynamic way, then competition between its different interpretations is unavoidable, if we think of “culture” as a definitively fixed social structure, then the issue can be reduced to a question of accepting the visual differences within a given social system.

The issue of cultural progress comes from the ideology of enlightenment, but this ideology did not bring us an answer concerning the origin of progress. Is it an



“immanent” process based on a material which would act independently or is it coming from a force giving life and energy to this material (Tosel, 1995, pp. 163–164). We are then arriving at a stage where we have to take into account a basic fact: two conditions for the development of a dynamic society are its openness and relative tolerance. Such a society must be a creative synthesis of several cultures and it needs dynamism and progress coming from both supporters of rationality (and even able-to-doubt materialists) and supporters of some form of spirituality able to idealize reality and imagine paths of development. Ipso facto, such a coexistence must be based on emulation and be able to ensure some forms of social balance between immanency and transcendence, in other words: unity within diversity.

## Mechanism of regressive social processes

Nowadays, we can observe that our world has entered a stage of crisis and stagnation of economical development, of growing economical gap between countries and regions, of increased stratification and social atomism, especially in Europe, North America and Arabic countries. Simultaneously with the crisis of modernistic ideologies which tends to weaken the belief in rationality and progress, we observe the ossification of every religion and paradoxical development of religious relativism and individualism. That creates a situation of intellectual chaos and lack of social dynamics. It becomes difficult to see the difference between causes and effects of all those phenomena. But we can present the hypothesis that the crisis of the actual socio-economical structures is creating the basis on which the feeling of loss and lack of perspectives grows, especially in the youngest, the precarious ones, the new “lumpenproletarians”. That in turn creates the desire to search for a scapegoat, leading to intolerance, and the desire to barricade ourselves in a safe ghetto, both mental and physical – the temptation to “culturalize”, to “religify”, to “Islamize”, to “Judaize”, to “Christianize”, etc. All those negative social processes can be observed all over our globalized world. What can help us is to realise that the basic cause of this phenomenon is not linked to one culture or another, to one religion or another, to one nation or another, to one “civilization” or another, but stems the disintegration of all of them, under different conditions, but basically under the influence of the global economy and globalized culture spread in an fundamentally unequal and unfair world. This basic issue is connected to the inability to analyse the common social roots of all those phenomena. That leads us to our thesis that the fundamental cause of our problems is socio-economic and that, on this basis, we can analyse the cause of the development of all forms of sectarianism, religious and secular ones, “Islamist”, “Neo-Evangelical” or “neoconservative” ones, which are all developing, and taking different forms, from within all previous world views, religions or ideologies. But we must remember that, with the exception of fascistic ideologies, their roots all lie within the principles of religions or ideologies promoting at their very beginning peace, spirituality, intellectuality, rationality, love and justice (Esack, 2015). Those roots that have been perverted by the powerful in the course of history, and in the course of historical social, economical, political conflicts.

The real issue is not the one of multiculturalism, but the one of global “uniculturalism” which prevents every culture, every ideology, every world view from finding that which is dynamic and progressive in their heritage.

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