

MULTICULTURALISM AND POLITICAL CORRECTNESS: THEORETICAL-CONCEPTUAL ASPECTS

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Abstract

In this article the author will analyze the relationship between multiculturalism and political correctness through theoretical-conceptual aspects, which are based on the same idea, namely on respect for cultural diversity and the national identity of a person. As a political theory, multiculturalism is present on the territory of a state, more than a cultural community, based on the values and practices that its members share, and as a political practice, political correctness is based on the idea that people should care, not to express or act in a way that could offend, exclude or marginalize socially disadvantaged or discriminated people. At the current stage, in the process of analyzing the national identity of a person, political correctness (PC) is considered as a strategic component of multiculturalism, because PC draws attention to human rights that must be respected and recognized publicly, and any form of abuse against man, whether in physical, verbal or psychological form, needs to be punished and held accountable according to the international legislative norms of the UN Charter.

Keywords: multiculturalism, political correctness (PC), cultural diversity, national identity, human rights.

Political correctness (PC) is observed as a strategic component of multiculturalism, because PC draws attention to human rights that must be respected and recognized at the public level, and any form of abuse against a person, whether in physical, verbal or psychological form, is to be punished and held accountable according to the international legislative norms of the UN Charter. Multiculturalism, actually, supports human rights, but this term focuses on multicultural rights at a more complex level than on human rights.

According to Feischmidt M., a Hungarian researcher, multiculturalism is meant to defend the right of existence of each culture within a society that presents cultural diversity and the reason for its conception is to oppose the strategies of cultural and identity homogenization of the country, which are characteristic of modernity. The strategic essence of homogenization is associated with a tyrannical, repressive or unsatisfactory aspect whereas, as an alternative, the strategies of heterogenization and cultural diversity emphasize differentiation, recognition, tolerance and acceptance of diversity.¹ Feischmidt explains from her point of view that from the perspective of multiculturalism, each culture has the right to preserve its own identity, and at the level of state policy, this is manifested by the idea that diversity must not only be tolerated, but also supported, and against this background, two directions of political actions are suggested: the first direction is the pluralistic transformation of national organizational institutions and services, and the second direction is the creation of institutions, in which ethnic minorities can preserve their cultural heritage, without thus losing their chance to social equality.

¹ Feischmidt., M. Multiculturalismul: o nouă perspectivă științifică și politică despre cultură și identitate. <http://altera.adatbank.transindex.ro/pdf/12/002.pdf> (accessed la 07.03.2023).

Huzum E., a Romanian researcher, believes that multiculturalism is based on the idea of a good society, and multiculturalist visions of a prosperous and a solidary society, every time being invoked the legitimization of an important series of public policies. According to Huzum E, the legitimization of such policies is the fundamental goal of all multiculturalist thinkers and among the most typical of these policies are, for example, the removal of some laws regarding ethnic minorities in conflict with their beliefs or cultural practices, the representation of ethnic minorities in the political institutions of the state, knowledge of the native and international language at a high qualification level, etc.² Multiculturalism, especially social justice multiculturalism, presupposes a policy of cultural accommodation in which the state and government institutions have the moral obligation to create conditions for newcomers, i.e. immigrants and refugees, to feel at home, and no cultural and national minority should feel disadvantaged or neglected by the native cultural majority. On the opposite level of cultural accommodation, is assimilationism, according to which multicultural states must pursue a policy of cultural homogenization, that the existence of a common national culture for all is a condition of true cohesion between the members of this society. However, the theory of assimilationism imposed by the state is criticized, especially for the fact that it can generate major social conflicts.

Closely related to the notion of multiculturalism is political correctness (PC). Faist T., a British analyst, considers political correctness a concept as widespread as multiculturalism because it determines the mechanism of behavior in various situations of social and political interaction. Political correctness consists of norms or rules that seek to avoid language, behavior or policies that cause offense, discrimination or damage to certain groups in society, mostly minorities. To a certain extent, the political discourse and practice of political correctness can be seen both as a precedent and as an integral part of the manifestation of multiculturalism.³

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, political correctness is a mechanism for following the belief that language and practices which could offend political sensibilities (as in matters of sex or race) should be eliminated.⁴ In the American Heritage Dictionary, political correctness, or politically correct, means a way of conforming to a particular sociopolitical ideology or point of view, especially to a liberal point of view concerned with promoting tolerance and avoiding offense in matters of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation⁵.

A Canadian researcher, Ayim M⁶., determined three important factors of "political correctness" (PC): identifying real and trivial problems that are attributed to PC; analyzing the problems for those involved in PC; and finding solutions on these problems by conferring a sense of legitimacy on the opposition movement. The researcher also identified differences between the arguments directed towards

² Huzum., E. Ce este multiculturalismul? Idei și valori perene în științele socio-umane. Studii și cercetări, Ana Gugiuman (coord), Argonaut, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, p. 47.

³ Faist., T. The Blind Spot of Multiculturalism: From Heterogeneities to Social (In) Equalities, Bielefeld: COMCAD, 2012. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/15986772.pdf> (accessed 07.03.2023).

⁴ Politically Correct. (n.d.). In Merriam-Webster dictionary online. Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/political%20correctness> (Accessed 07.03.2023).

⁵ Politically Correct. (N.D.). In The American Heritage Dictionary of the English language. Houghton Mifflin Company. Retrieved from <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Political+Correctness>(Accessed 07.03.2023).

⁶ Ayim., M. (1998). Just how correct is political correctness? A critique of the opposition's arguments. *Argumentation*, Vol 12, Nr.4, p.445.

ideological content of PC and PC methodology. Arguments directed at the ideological content of PC are divided into arguments threatening freedom of expression, arguments threatening intellectual and academic freedom and the argument leading to the degradation of human values. And the arguments directed at the PC methodology are divided into the dispute that the PC commits the very evils it addresses and uses unfair means to achieve its own interests, that racist and sexist discourses in educational settings must be limited and punished, the reduction of toxic influences on policies which promote the victimization of oppressed groups. It means that political correctness is not only correct but also morally obligatory for a multicultural society.

Ellis F., a British researcher, explains that the first use of the term political correctness dates back to the period between 1895 to 1921, when Lenin was trying to achieve two goals: the first goal was to secure his power over his fellow revolutionaries, and the second goal, was to consolidate the control of the Bolshevik party over the new Soviet state, after the First World War 1917-1918.⁷

A political analyst from U.S., Epstein B⁸., considers PC a "Leninist correctness", because it was used as a political and ideological weapon of propaganda against the enemies of political opposition, against those values and ideas which were not compatible or a threat to Communists and Bolsheviks. Virtually every sector of the radical movement was overtaken by Soviet parties in the late 1960s. In the case of the USA, sometimes, during the anti-war movement in 1960-1980, PC was used as a tool by activists such as straight white men against other activists, who campaigned on the side for women rights of different races and LGBT rights, fighting for the rights of sexual identity and sexual orientations.

Another British researcher, Lind B⁹., mentions that the term PC was described as a dangerous term, considered an ideological movement, as it has destroyed the lives of tens of millions of people in Europe, Russia, China, and even in the whole world since the 20th century, in the two World Wars, namely through mass ethnic cleansing, forced colonization of territories and indigenous populations killing, illegal and massive mass deportations, torture, chemical and harmful experiments, destruction and diminution of indigenous culture replacing it with a fake culture, as a propaganda project, and the fabrication of false historical sources of national and native linguistic identity. Lind B., considers PC, a negative term and a threat to human rights, and related to another non-democratic term, called Cultural Marxism. Because if we observe clearly and logically from an analytical and historical point of view, we need to understand that political correctness is viewed as Cultural Marxism because Marxism is the social and economic theory developed by Karl Marx, but Cultural Marxism, is a conspiracy theory misrepresenting the Frankfurt School as being responsible for modern progressive movements, identity politics and political correctness. Political correctness and Cultural Marxism are based on the following similarities:

- first of all, both terms, PC and Cultural Marxism are totalitarian ideologies that tend to diminish the rational and creative thinking of a person.

⁷ Ellis., F. (2002). Political correctness and the ideological struggle: From Lenin and Mao to Marcuse and Foucault. *The Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies*, Vol.27, Nr.4, p.409.

⁸ Epstein., B. (1992, February 26). 'Political correctness' and identity politics. In *These Times*, p.16.

⁹ Lind., B. (2000, February 5). The origins of political correctness. URL: <http://www.academia.org/the-origins-of-political-correctness/> (Accessed 07.03.2023).

- second, the Cultural Marxism and political correctness, both have a unique history because, when it comes to economy, Marxism says that all history is determined by ownership of production, then cultural Marxism and political correctness, is determined by power, over other groups who are deemed undesirable.

- Third, to Marxism, certain groups, such as workers and peasants, are positioned among the better and more privileged classes, and in the case of the bourgeoisie, national intellectuals, and landowners such as landlords and tenants, they are considered an immoral class and must be punished. Nowadays, cultural Marxism and PC, hold certain privileged classes or groups as privileged, such as feminists, African-Europeans or African-Americans, Latin Americans, Jews, homosexuals, lesbians, transsexuals, atheists, independent intellectuals, these groups are determined as victims against white superior patriarchy and are seen as on the side of good, regardless of the status and position they hold. Whereas white, European men are seen as on the side of evil, the equivalent of the bourgeoisie class in Marxist economics.

- Fourth, Cultural Marxism and PC use a strategy of expulsion because for example, the communists took over a country like Russia, they expropriated the bourgeoisie and confiscated their property. Similarly, Cultural Marxism and PC take over a college campus, expropriate through things like admissions quotas. For example, when a student of Muslim religious affiliation and ethnic Arab affiliation with superior qualifications is denied admission to a college in favor of a European Christian, who is not as well qualified, then the Muslim student is expelled.

- And finally, both terms, Cultural Marxism and PC have a method of analysis of doing an act of ending a legal agreement in constructive way and that is the dissolution. Because in essence, dissolution is a process by which any text takes over, any original cultural meanings are either destroyed or modified, by reintroducing a new culture and a new national identity. For Marxism, this process happened during the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and for Cultural Marxism from the 80s until present, the dissolution process happened in the form of political correctness.

However, since the late 80s and 90s, there has been another change in the approach to the definition of political correctness, albeit in a completely different manner than the original used in the past, that is in totalitarian ex-communist countries. A British researcher Hughes G¹⁰, explains that the respective term, PC, entered the consciousness of the Western public with the opening of the debate in the United States of America about the supposed advantages and disadvantages of political correctness in the democratic world, which quickly reached from the academic level to the public space. The debate took place in universities, but because of the prevalence of university education in the American society, the term PC became an object of widespread interest in all political and governmental institutions.

An American journalist, Bernstein R.,¹¹ critically observes PC as a phenomenon that leads to an increased level of intolerance, which leads to shutting down the debate of free speech and free critical

¹⁰ Hughes, G. Political correctness: a history of semantics and culture. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. URL: <https://www.pdfdrive.com/political-correctness-a-history-of-semantics-and-culture-d18855974.html> \Political Correctness A History of Semantics and Culture (PDFDrive).pdf (Accessed 07.03.2023).

¹¹ Bernstein, R. (1990, October 28). The rising hegemony of the politically correct. The New York Times. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/10/28/weekinreview/ideas-trends-the-risinghegemony-of-the-politically-correct.html> (Accessed 07.03.2023).

discourse, which leads to a pressure or risk being accused of changing sexist, racist and homophobic rhetoric. Bernstein identified some of the key areas influenced or shaped by political correctness such as affirmative action, race and gender issues, and environmentalism, and then presented his own perception of the given phenomenon: one central picture, which has its roots in the 1960s, where for centuries western society has been dominated by what is called "the European patriarchal power structure" or "a patriarchal hegemony". And everyone except straight white men has suffered some form of repression and been denied a cultural voice or prevented from celebrating what is commonly called "the diversity of the individual identity of man in general".

But an American analyst, Moller D¹²., has a different point of view from Bernstein, claiming that political correctness is an attempt to promote the legitimate interests of certain groups in the public sphere. However, this type of norm brings with it certain costs that should not be neglected, sometimes in the form of conflict with other values we value, sometimes by creating an internal schism that threatens us with collective irrationality. PC thus generates dilemmas. According to Moller D., PC represents a method to establish norms of speech or sometimes, of behavior, which are believed to: protect vulnerable, marginalized or historically victimized groups; and which work by shaping public discourse, often by inhibiting speech or other forms of social signaling; and that they should avoid insulting and offending, a low sense of self-esteem by offending the sensibilities of such groups or their allies. PC is strongly promoted, especially through the media, although less common in post-Soviet countries, where religious traditions are quite influential. PC often begins to appear as a very strong type of censorship, paying attention to the freedom of expression. Any statement, which is borderline, even said in jest, can become a pretext for unpleasantness, dismissal and even social ostracism. PC is often perceived as a kind of practice, a type of behavior, in which people are prohibited from using specific words or expressions that certain groups of people may find offensive.

The researchers from Republic of Moldova, Țurcan G¹³., and from Romania, Farcaș A-D¹⁴., proposed various new words and expressions, various substitutes to name the representatives of a minority for PC. And these lexical proposals are sometimes manifested by the appearance of strange terms, such as "green operator" instead of "sweeper". Under the influence of the idea of political correctness, words and expressions that were commonly used a few years or months ago become inappropriate, crude and controversial. It is expected that a modern person in a democratic society should avoid words and expressions that may offend or humiliate others. But sometimes, instead of solving real problems, people just change the terms. Also, special attention is paid to the words used for a certain minority that can have the opposite effect, emphasizing their status as special or weak. This can prevent prejudice, racism, etc. from really being overcome. And simply changing words will not improve

¹² Moller, D. Dilemmas of Political Correctness. In: Journal of Practical Ethics. Volume 4, Issue 1, 2016. URL: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f80be5a21d29366e84a124e/t/6064f8089bd4fa0504306e71/1617229832677/Dilemmas+copy.pdf> (accesat 10.03.2023).

¹³ Țurcan., G. Multiculturalism și corectitudine politică. In: Teoria și practica administrării publice. 21 mai 2021, Chișinău. Chișinău, Republica Moldova: Tipografia Print-Caro, 2021, pp. 183-186. URL: https://ibn.idsi.md/vizualizare_articol/141933 (Accessed 07.03.2023).

¹⁴ Farcaș AD., Corectitudinea politică în societatea multiculturală. În: Jurnal Buletin Stiintific, seria A, Fascicula Filologie, Editura UT Press, Vol. 28, Nr.1, 2019, p. 367-376. URL: [http://bslr.ubm.ro/files/2019/30.Farcas_Ana_Daniela_\(367-379\)_BSLR_2019 .pdf](http://bslr.ubm.ro/files/2019/30.Farcas_Ana_Daniela_(367-379)_BSLR_2019.pdf)

relations between different groups of people. Political correctness tries to base itself on a culture of total surveillance. And everything that goes against the dogma of multiculturalism is condemned by the representatives of certain aggressive groups. As a result, in some countries the polarization of society is becoming stronger than ever.

In conclusion, we can state that multiculturalism, is an important idea about the harmonious coexistence of different cultures within the same society, but it brought disappointments, especially to immigrants, ethnic minorities, and indigenous populations, through political correctness. In many ways, PC manifests more often the totalitarian characteristics, by trying to control not only the behavior and expression, but sometimes even the thoughts of individuals. As for the positive aspects, PC is useful as a co-defense strategy against discrimination and violence against human rights and cultural rights, so it needs to be revised, since the content of some elements came from totalitarian ideology and exaggerations of some words. In order to solve the problems faced by multiculturalism, socio-cultural integration courses are mandatory for immigrants; the further implementation and development of intercultural education; the recognition of values in multicultural diversity, by valuing what other cultures offer; encouraging the contribution of diverse groups; empowering people to strengthen themselves and others to achieve their maximum potential by being critical of their biases; and celebrating rather than just tolerating the differences in order to bring about unity through diversity. Multiculturalism and PC appears as a solution for the problems of modern societies and must remain as a strategic solution and not as an obstacle to the development of human well-being.

The first correlation between multiculturalism and PC determines the mechanism of behavior in various situations of social and political interaction. The second correlation between these two terms is maintaining balance by taking urgent, accountable, and publicly transparent action. If political correctness requires the search for solutions, to avoid language, behavior or policies that cause offense, discrimination or damage to some groups in society; most often the ethnic minority, immigrants and refugees, and multiculturalism demands from the state institutions, regionally and globally, where immigrants must be helped not only to preserve their own culture, but also help to interact easily as members of the society, with the aim of not being socially isolated or discriminated against for indirect or direct reasons of cultural differences and identity or nationality of a person. The third correlation is that these two terms come as a warning to leaders from the Western countries, which is to diminish populism of policy in the form of selective camps, to not play dirty games for political interests, and the political practice of PC can be seen both as a useful strategy and as an integral part of the manifestation of multiculturalism, in order to ensure that the native population does not feel neglected and discriminated in favor of immigrants, refugees and the ethnic minority and vice versa, and giving support and attention to the cultural identity not only to those who come to the host country, but also to those who receive them in the host country.

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