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MULTICULTURAL VALUES IN THE 19TH CENTURY OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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Today in the early 21st century it is quite challenging to find completely mononational state. Throughout the world history new territorial gains, wars, willing or unwilling (forced) migrations, trade relations, economic and climate conditions changed the ethnic picture of the world not once. United under the rule of one state different cultural groups had to leave together and figure out the written or unwritten rules of peaceful coexistence. The need of respect for cultural, religious, social differences in the end gave a shape to the idea of the concept of multiculturalism. Although “the clear trend across western democracies towards the increased recognition and accommodation of diversity through a range of multiculturalism policies and minority rights” [15, p. 97] can be observed from 1970s to mid-1990s, such policies could be found in 19th century societies either. The present article deals with multicultural values existed in the Ottoman society formed by the 19th century in inhabited by more than 22 different ethnic groups the Ottoman Empire.

Keywords: Ottoman, society, multicultural, 19th century, nation.

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INTRODUCTION

Today in the early 21st century it is quite challenging to find completely mononational state. Throughout the world history new territorial gains, wars, willing or unwilling (forced) migrations, trade relations, economic and climate conditions changed the ethnic picture of the world not once. United under the rule of one state different cultural groups had to leave together and figure out the written or unwritten rules of peaceful coexistence. The need of respect for cultural, religious, social differences in the end gave a shape to the idea of the concept of multiculturalism.

In some literature multiculturalism is given a definition as a consisting part of political ideology, aimed to work out the political and legislative conditions of tolerant and harmonic coexistence of representatives of distinct ethnic groups which carry their own cultural, economic, social mentality, without disturbing a stability of their traditional life style. Political side of this question mainly deals with granting of certain rights (individual or collective) to these groups on the grounds of the principles those cultures have, as well as with equal recognition of various cultures avoiding privileging any dominant communities. According to multicultural principles, a state has to “remain neutral between groups and ensure that basic liberal rights are fairly and consistently applied across cultural differences” [12, p. 10169]. As a reference for the main principals of multiculturalism, which include state’s acceptance and valuing of cultural diversity, fair access to social resources and elimination of obstacles which prevent marginal cultural groups from socializing, encouraging their participation in all aspects of state’s life, support of the reproduction and development of different cultures, etc., the ideologists and researchers of multiculturalism use the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966), the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981), the *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* (1992), the Universal



Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) [9] and a list of other local and international documents which were designed to protect the rights each human has inherent. Thus, emerged as an opposition to the “melting pot” theory the concept of multiculturalism was put forward to support the “salad bowl” or the “glorious mosaic” [10, p. 10] image of multiethnic society, where an acknowledgement of diversity lets the different cultures maintain their distinctiveness.

Although “the clear trend across western democracies towards the increased recognition and accommodation of diversity through a range of multiculturalism policies and minority rights” [15, p. 97] can be observed from 1970s to mid-1990s, such policies could be found in 19th century societies either. The present article deals with multicultural values existed in the Ottoman society in the 19th century.

MAIN PART

Multicultural values in the 19th century ottoman society

Canadian political philosopher, the author of numerous works on multiculturalism, Will Kymlichka in his work “The rise and fall of multiculturalism?” puts forward an idea, stating that “multiculturalism is as old as humanity: different cultures have always found ways of co-existing and respect for diversity was a familiar feature of many empires throughout history” [6, p. 5]. The Ottoman Empire which existed more than 600 years (1299-1922) was covering a vast territory inhabited by more than 22 distinct ethnic groups. To control this huge cultural diversity an efficient system was needed. As known, internal affairs in the Empire were regulated by the “Ottoman Law” (Osmanlı kanunu), which rested on two pillars - “Shar-i” and “Orf” (Şer-i ve Örf). The Shar-i consisted of “some basic principles of politics applied within the empire that did not change in general. The source of its unchanging politics and the legal foundation on which it was based were the provisions brought by Islam” [2, p. 9]. The Ottoman state regulated the social, economic and administrative aspects of the state life in accordance with these provisions established through the Holy book (Quran) and the sunnah. The policy of the state, which may change or support a diversity leaned upon the customs (örf). “The source of the custom based laws were national culture, traditions, rituals. Although some customary practices could go against the generally accepted by shari’a rules, however, the Ottoman ulema always used to know how to make the customary practices that did not comply with the shari’a more reconcilable” [2, p. 9]. Thus, being quite liberal in its approach to a different cultures and taking these principles as a base for the further actions, the Empire designed a specific control system called “millet system”.

“Nation system” of the Ottoman Empire was a “political organization which granted to the non-Muslims the right to organize into communities possessing certain delegated powers under their own ecclesiastical heads” [13, p. 212]. It is known, that before the late 19th century the word “millet” - “nation” mainly referred to religious communities. During the Ottoman military campaigns non-Muslim population surrendered without armed resistance was guaranteed its live, property and the practice of their religion if accept the political superiority of Muslim Turks. Members of such communities who went under the Ottoman dominion were given a name “dhimmi” (“zimmi”) - “protected people” [16, p. 190]. When Sultan Mehmet II the Conqueror captured Constantinople, present Istanbul (1453), he ordered the Greeks to hold the election of the patriarch as a token of the freedom they were given to continue practice their religion. The chosen patriarch would later receive not only church leadership responsibilities, but also a list of political duties to rule the community. Given a title of “Millet bashy” (“millet başı”) - “Head of millet”, he would also be engaged in the reforms of millet’s internal governance, educational, court, tax, etc. systems, and from that time on he would be considered as one of the Empire’s bureaucrats. Bulgarian, Serbian Churches, Antioch (Antakya) and Alexandria (Iskenderiye) Patriarchate were next placed under the jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. The similar administrative status was given also to the Armenian Patriarchate. This religious institution received the right to



control “the rest” of the Christian population of the Empire which did not belong to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. Assyrian, Ethiopian, Coptic Churches, gypsies, Syrian and Egyptian monophysites, Bosnian bogomils were under its jurisdiction. The head of Jewish community in his turn was given a title of “Hahambaşı” and the same rights and responsibilities as his Christian peers and was responsible for the whole Jewish community within the Ottoman borders [1]. Thus, within the Ottoman lands there considered four main “millets” - the Turks, the Greek Orthodox, Armenian and Jewish communities. Apropos for above mentioned it should be noted, that religious affiliation as a criteria for distinction existed in many world societies of those days. As an example, an American sociologist Nathan Glazer in his work “We are all Multiculturalists now” in terms of American society said, that “in the 1840s, 1850s, 1890s, and after the First World War in the days when the Ku Klux Klan boomed, the chief issues were whether Catholic children would attend public schools of a Protestant cast, whether children should be taught in German public schools” etc. [10, p. 9]. In times, when ethnicity, race, nationality, nation was not yet turned into an object of social and political segregation, religious affiliation was the only criteria for a determination of “others”. Nowadays, when all traits for further distinction were gathered under the one term “cultural diversity” the theorists of the ideology of multiculturalism offer various approaches to this question.

Australian political theorist Chandran Kukathas put forward four main models of responses of a state to the problem of cultural diversity: “isolationism” takes place when a society tries “to restrict membership by forbidding entry by outsiders, and also to enforce conformity within their boundaries by denying those who are different the opportunity to integrate; “interventionist” societies “want to see other people conform to their way of life but are unwilling to allow them to become a part of that society”; “assimilationist” societies tolerate or permit the admission of outsiders without seeking forcibly to enforce membership, but nonetheless require all members of society to integrate fully into the ways of the dominant culture; and the fourth type, “liberal multicultural” societies, in general, admit outsiders without either encouraging or deterring them from seeking membership and tolerate their ways whether they seek to integrate into the new society or elect to hold on to their separate traditions and beliefs [14]. Numerous travel accounts, reports, memoirs by representatives of various Western cultures, who spent time in the Ottoman Empire show that the fourth type of society can be easily attributed to the latter.

The work “Constantinople Essays” by the Russian orientalist, diplomat and traveller Constantine Bazili in the chapter dedicated to “four people” living in the Ottoman Empire gives a comprehensive account on the way these four millets co-existed in 1830s and the way the state reacted on their existence within the borders. He writes that for several centuries four people have been living in one city, but instead of drawing closer to each other, on the contrary, they only move away. They almost never live in the same quarter, have no relationship other than simple trades, and are governed separately, each nation by its own laws, its own justice. “The internal government of these four people resembles of four patriarchal republics, between which there is nothing in common, except for the storm of power hanging over them. They are completely alien to the fate of the Ottoman Empire; their happiness and grief will never be shared” [3, p. 145]. The Greeks traditionally lived in Phanar (Fener) neighbourhood, where they had their own churches, colleges, hospitals and a printing house, where they printed their own textbooks and prayer books: “Here they even printed an Encyclopedic dictionary of Greek and Byzantine literature, first two volumes of which were more than 3000 pages” [3, p. 156]. It was the biggest dictionary in whole Europe of those times. The most eminent institution which survived till our days was the Phanar Greek Orthodox College or Phanar Roman Orthodox Lyceum (Özel Fener Rum Lisesi) located in Balat, known in Greek as the Great School of the Nation and Patriarchal Academy of Constantinople, established in 1454 by the Patriarch Gennadius Scholarius, the first patriarch selected by Christian



population of Constantinople at the direction of Sultan Mehmet II the Conqueror. The curriculum of these schools had only Greek subjects, such as language, literature, philosophy, religion etc.

At this point it should be noted that the preservation of a national language played a great role in the multicultural policy of the Ottoman Empire. After the conquest of Constantinople Sultan Mehmet II the Conqueror allowed the local population of Pera and Galata to leave the city peacefully, but most of the merchants soon returned with a guarantee of complete surrender, and later many Genoese inhabitants of Pera accepted Turkish citizenship [11, p. 274]. The origin of the inhabitants of Pera was evidenced, first of all, by “the native language that they preserved” [17, p. 2] and which was spoken until the second half of the 19th century. This knowledge of languages will later allow the “Perotes” to hold such an important public position as dragomans - court translators. The multicultural character of Galata and Pera was described by various travelers in their memoirs or travel notes. For example, in 1833, in his “Sketches on Turkey in 1831-1832”, the American zoologist James De Kay described these places as follows: “Galata is almost completely occupied by Christians. It is here that all the shops and offices of merchants and artisans are gathered, and all foreign commercial centers are also concentrated here. After all, here they are exempt from taxes and are content with other important privileges” [8, p. 76].

The Armenians mainly inhabited the part of the city called Yedikule - “Seven towers”, however they could be found scattered all over the Bosphorus coastline: “They do not have past and historical memory, or at least hardly engaged with this issue; they are scattered all over the earth and did not save a devout memory about a common motherland. For them love for the motherland, ambitions and fame are a chimera; all their dreams and wishes aim for gold and all profitable trades are opened for them; as eastern Englishmen they took over all internal trade in Turkey and seem to lock in chests like in tombs all treasures” [3, p. 157]. The commercial success of the Armenians led to appearance of the so-called amira class in Constantinople - the elite group of wealthy merchants and financiers of this millet. Due to their material wealth and religious affiliation they had an open access to the most modern educative facilities of both the Empire and Europe. For their services some families, for example, were awarded management of the imperial mint. The Balyans held the post of an architect to the sultan from 1750 to the end of the nineteenth century and were responsible for the construction of a number of imperial residences and palaces. With their financial assistance and efforts the Armenian community of Constantinople was easily receiving licenses to establish educational centers, charitable institutions, hospitals, churches etc. The Ottoman government granted them all possible facilities to live their religious, traditional and daily life the way they are told by their own head of millet. The granted level of self-regulation of the millet was so high that it led to a draft of a so-called constitution (Nizamnâme-i Millet-i Ermeniyân) for the Armenian millet. The document was adopted by an assembly on 24 May 1860, came into force three years later. The 150 regulations written down in that document contained the rights and responsibilities according to which this millet throughout the empire reorganized the life of its own communities pursuing national traditions all by itself without state interference.

The Jews in the Ottoman Empire lived mainly in the district called Haskoy (Hasköy) in the Golden Horn: “It was like a whole big city with 70.000 of population, which could be considered the world capital of Israel. The sons of Israel, not finding refuge in Catholic Europe, resorted to the hospitality of the East and found patronage and religious tolerance in the kingdom of the Koran. They are now more satisfied with their life here than in many European cities, and enjoy the same rights with all the millets - subjects of the Turks” [3, p. 173, 176, 177]. As other millets, they were engaged in trade, had their own small businesses, openly practiced religion, were given rights to build own schools and support traditions.

Professor of law Seyra Benhabib in her work “The Claims of culture” distinguishes “strong” or “mosaic” multiculturalism, when groups of people and cultures are clearly divided and those identifiable communities that exist with each other are like pieces of a puzzle, maintaining rigid



boundaries [4, p. 9]. Considering the way these four millets lived according to accounts the western travellers leaved on their stay in the Ottoman Empire it is somewhat possible to apply this definition to a type of multiculturalism existed within the Empire boundaries. Four millets lived mainly in certain districts, did not have any intentions to integrate into common society and did not thrive for any interactions except those for business, trade or state issues, freely practiced their religion and celebrated only their own religious holidays, however, creating one whole state population, indeed made an image of a piece of a puzzle with rigid edges but when put altogether creates a complete picture. Thus, the “millet system” turned out to be an effective implement to deal with main distinct cultural groups of the state, which allowed them co-exist peacefully for a long time, up to 19th century. New philosophic, political, social ideas spread all over the world after the French Revolution (1789), as well as a new economic reality appeared after the Industrial Revolution (late 18th century) led to certain changes also in political demands of society.

The 19th century is marked by a series of socio-political reforms, which led the different world societies along a new modern way of development. In those times such concepts as liberty, equality, human rights etc. began to define the direction of a new political course in the western governments. In the history of non-European countries, this period of reforms was called a “period of modernization”, “Europeanization” or “Westernization”. Started as the implementation of certain reforms, the main purpose of which at first was to improve country’s economic and military power, this reform activity went deeper and affected more areas, what would soon lead to the restructuring of the whole traditional centuries-old state system. For example, the reforms of Muhammad Ali (20s of the XIX century) in Egypt, the reforms of Tagi Khan (1848-1851) in Iran, the Meiji Restoration (1868- 1889) in Japan, etc., starting as military-economic reforms after the palace administration realized the weakness of the country in the face of the threat of the military-technical development of the West, soon spread to the social sphere and led to the emergence of a new stratum - the intelligence. This stratum would later be the initiator of the introduction of a western-style constitution in the country, the change of the regime of absolute monarchy to a constitutional one, and the convocation of parliament. The Tanzimat reforms (1839-1876) in the Ottoman Empire could also be added to this list. A new modern Ottoman bureaucracy appeared after those reforms were a stratum who took the question of multicultural policy to a new level. As Hoffman-Novotny writes, a “multiculturalism implies the pathos of striving for equality in the existence of different cultures” [18, p.39]. The Edict of Gulhane (Gülhane Hatt-ı Şerif) which crowned the Tanzimat reforms aimed exactly to provide an absolute “equality” between millets. This document proclaimed in 1839 consisted of description of equal rights for all millets to be equally protected in terms of life, property, dignity, to be treated equally fairly in terms of taxes and recruitment of soldiers. It says: “All imperial privileges apply to all my subjects without distinction of religion or sect; they will all without exception, exercise these rights” [5, p. 203-207].

CONCLUSION

Thus, although the concept of multiculturalism appeared in the mid-20th century, the values of peaceful coexistence were cherished even long before. To describe the typical middle ages societies the geographer J.S.Furnivall suggested the term “plural society”: “The term plural society seems to have been coined by Dr.J.S.Furnivall to describe a society comprising two or more elements or social orders which live side by side within the same political unit yet without mingling” [7, p. 55]. In this sort of society each group practices its own religion, follows own culture and language, lives by its own ideas and ways. As individuals representatives of these societies meet, but only in the marketplace in order to buy or sell something. The plural society consists of different sections of the community living side by side within the same political unit. Later, with the development of social relations, with the change of political map and appearance of new concepts in law and international relations, researchers who study complex societies used to face the issues pertaining to cultural



rights and politicization of diversity. In this case the problem of multiculturalism and cultural diversity was put forward; new definitions and values were developed.

The history of the Ottoman Empire shows that all these processes are relevant to the historical development of its society either. The Empire was one of those old states who embraced diversity of four millets living on its territory and provided each of them with certain rights which with the course of the time improved. Four main millets lived under the “millet system” for almost six centuries, openly practiced their religion, traditions and customs, were engaged in trade and many other businesses and prosper each in its own way. With the Tanzimat reforms they were recognized as equal in terms of certain new political, social and economic conditions. All these proves that values of peaceful coexistence of different cultural groups as a further defined value of multiculturalist policy of modern democratic states can also be traces back then in the Ottoman society.

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XIX ƏSR OSMANLI İMPERİYASINDA MULTICULTURAL DƏYƏRLƏR

N.Q. Ağayeva

Bu gün XXI əsrin əvvəllərində dünyada tamamilə monomilli dövlət tapmaq olduqca çətindir. Dünya tarixi boyu yeni ərazi uğrunda savaqlar, müharibələr, könüllü və ya məcburi köçlər, ticarət əlaqələri, iqtisadi və iqlim şəraiti dünyanın etnik mənzərəsini bir neçə dəfə artıq kökündən dəyişdirmişdir. Bir dövlətin hakimiyyəti altında birləşən müxtəlif mədəniyyət qrupları bir araya gəlib dinc yanaşı yaşamanın yazılı və ya yazılmamış qaydalarını müəyyənləşdirməli olmuşdurlar. Mədəni, dini, sosial fərqliliklərə hörmətin zərurəti sonda multikulturalizm anlayışı ideyasını formalaşdırmışdı. “Bir sıra multikulturalizm siyasəti və azlıqların hüquqları vasitəsilə müxtəlifliyin daha çox tanınması istiqamətində qərb demokratiyalarında aydın tendensiya” [15, p. 97] 1970-ci illərdən 1990-cı illərin ortalarına qədər müşahidə olunsa da, bu cür siyasətlərə XIX əsr cəmiyyətlərində də rast gəlmək olar. Təqdim olunan məqalə Osmanlı İmperiyasında 22-dən çox müxtəlif etnik qrupların yaşadığı XIX əsrdə formalaşmış Osmanlı cəmiyyətində mövcud olan multikultural dəyərlərdən bəhs edir.

Açar sözlər: *Osmanlı, cəmiyyət, multikultural, XIX əsr, millət*

МУЛЬТИКУЛЬТУРАЛЬНЫЕ ЦЕННОСТИ В ОСМАНСКОМ ОБЩЕСТВЕ XIX ВЕКА

Н.Г. Агаева

Сегодня, в начале XXI века, довольно сложно найти полностью мононациональное государство. На протяжении мировой истории новые территориальные приобретения, войны, добровольные или невольные (вынужденные) миграции, торговые отношения, экономические и климатические условия не раз меняли этническую картину мира. Объединенные под властью одного государства разные культурные группы были вынуждены вырабатывать писанные и неписанные правила мирного сосуществования. И эта необходимость уважения культурных, религиозных, социальных традиций друг друга в конечном итоге сформировала идею концепции мультикультурализма. Хотя «четкую тенденцию в западных демократиях к более широкому признанию культурного разнообразия посредством ряда политик мультикультурализма и прав меньшинств» [15, p. 97] можно наблюдать с 1970-х до середины 1990-х годов, подобная политика встречается и в обществах XIX века. В настоящей статье рассматриваются мультикультурные ценности, существовавшие в османском обществе, сформировавшемся к XIX веку в населенной более чем 22 различными этническими группами Османской империи.

Ключевые слова: *Османское, общество, мультикультурализм, XIX век, миллет*