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Ligia Tomoiagă

**Multiculturalism
and the Need for Recognition
&
The Border:
World Reconfigurations
of the 21st Century**

E I K O N

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limits and advantages; many of the participants advocated that historical multiculturalism is much different from the ideological and activist forms that it has gained in our contemporary world, which, for some, is not necessarily a good thing. To address such issues – as many of the participants admitted – a scholarly effort to do more field and theoretical research is crucial, and if the effort is interdisciplinary and free of any kind of political constraints, it may both ‘save’ the concept, and find its rightful place in society.

Thirdly, the organizers have not limited access to the conference for anybody who proposed an interesting papers. Consequently, there were full and emeritus professors, young faculty, Ph.D. students, highschool teachers, independent scholars, which brought a new and fresh spirit to the gathering and the discussions. Both ‘senior’ and ‘junior’ participants benefitted from such ‘mixture’.

We are very thankful to our keynote speakers – Professors Mihaela Albu, Roland Boer, Paul Cliteur, Catinca Stan, Margot Kaszap, Adrian Otoiu – for their exceptional and exemplary contribution, as well as the Dean and Deputy Dean of our Faculty, Assis. Professor Mircea Farcaș and Assist. Professor Delia Suioğan for their invaluable support.

As the conference was interdisciplinary, diverse, mixed, the volume is rather un-even, as we preferred not to get a homogeneous aspect for each study; we preferred to preserve each author’s style, more or less, their preferences as to citation, to spelling (British or American), to including an abstract and keywords or not, and to the way they listed their works cited. We also preserved the language of presentation – this is something that ‘rhymes’ with multiculturalism very well – so there are articles in English, in French and in Romanian.

Organisers and editors
 Ligia Tomoiagă and Anamaria Fălăuș

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Modern-Hostage Taking and the Sins of Multiculturalism

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The topic I want to address in this paper is “Modern Hostage Taking and the Sins of Multiculturalism”. The phrase “Sins of Multiculturalism” is inspired by an article of the famous multiculturalist philosopher Michael Walzer (*b.* 1935). In the early days of the Rushdie Affair, *i.e.* in 1989, Walzer wrote an article under the title “The Sins of Salman”.¹ In my view, the article by Walzer is a highly ambivalent piece of commentary on the death verdict issued by the Iranian cleric and politician Ayatollah Khomeini on Salman Rushdie. With “ambivalent” I mean that even after careful study it is hard to determine what Walzer is trying to say about the Rushdie Affair. Of course, he does not support the death verdict (*fatwa*) on Rushdie, but he does not present a forceful defense of freedom of speech either.

My aim is not to make moral commentary on this stance (at least not in this paper). What I want to do, is trying to understand this phenomenon from a sociological, psychological and cultural perspective. In my view, the ambivalence we find in the

¹ Walzer, Michael, “The Sins of Salman”, in: *The New Republic*, April 10, 1989, pp. 13-15.

commentary of Walzer is interesting. Not all intellectuals, but a substantial number had great difficulties in supporting Rushdie.

What fascinates me is: why? Why did very well-educated, liberal, democratic and the rule of law supporting intellectuals have so much difficulties in upholding free speech? And what has that to do, if anything, with multiculturalism?

Prima facie this is a very idiosyncratic interest and not worthy of a presentation on a conference like this. But my claim is, that as soon as you delve into the subject it appears huge. And my working hypothesis is that this reluctance to defend free speech has something to do with “multiculturalism”. Or, inspired by Walzer’s title, with the “Sins of Multiculturalism”.

Now, this was a spoiler, in a sense, because now you know what the conclusion is. But because this conclusion may raise eyebrows the argument is perhaps more interesting than the conclusion. So here comes my argument. Let me introduce this with a thought experiment.

Part 1 Modern Hostage Taking

The fatwa

It is an interesting thought experiment to ask what year, what date, in the history books of the future will figure prominently. We all have had those dates, years, inculcated during our history lessons. End of the Second World War: 1945. French Revolution: 1789. What are those dates for the *future* history books?

My bets are on 1989. Two hundred years after the French Revolution. This was the year of the fall, 1989, of the Berlin wall, which marked the end of communism as a world historical phenomenon. But it was also the year in which an aggressive new ideology presented itself (to the public at large, at least). I propose to call it: *radical Islamism*.

Khomeini’s *fatwa* was a clear and unambiguous manifestation of that ideology. Therefore it is enlightening to quote Khomeini’s *fatwa* in his own words, so that we can really assess the impact of that document:

I inform all zealous Muslims of the world that the author of the book entitled *The Satanic Verses*—which has been compiled, printed, and published in opposition to Islam, the Prophet, and the Koran—and all those involved in the publication who were aware of its contents, are sentenced to death.

I call upon all zealous Muslims to execute them quickly, wherever they may be found, so that no one else will dare to insult the Muslim sanctities. God willing, whoever is killed on this path is a martyr.

In addition, anyone who has access to the author of this book but does not possess the power to execute him should report him to the people so that he may be punished for his actions. (Quoted in Pipes 2010, 30–35; Pipes 2003, 27)²

Islamism not Islam

Radical Islamism should, as an *ideology*, not be confused with the *religion* of Islam, as Khomeini does, apparently. Islamism is the political ideology that *derives inspiration* from Islam, but is not identical with it. We may hope that Islamism will fail in transforming the religion of Islam into a more radical direction. We may also hope, must hope, that in the end Islamism will be conquered, like fascism was in 1945, or communism in 1989 was conquered. But there are no guarantees. And more importantly we do not know *when* we will succeed in that.

To provoke your imagination: it may even be the case (and this is a most distressing idea) that what we are witnessing today, is a real “reform” of Islam. So ISIL: this is the reform of Islam. Al Qaida: this is the reform of Islam. In others words: not in the direction we may hope for, but in the sense that radical movements, radical interpretations, gain the upper hand.

Let’s for the sake of argument assume that Islam, *i.e.* the *true nature of Islam* (whatever that is), may be a “religion of peace”. Then we still run the risk that the religion of peace is rapidly being transformed into an engine of war.

² In “Religion and Murder in the Middle East,” Bernard Lewis writes that Ayatollah Khomeini “knew no English and had apparently never read the novel” (Lewis 2004, 105).

Islamism as a challenge of our time

Contrary to what many western observers have thought, Islamism is fairly successful. The most recent offspring of Islamist ideology, the so-called “Islamic State” (ISIL, ISIS) is much more successful, from a military point to view, than we could have dreamt several decades ago.

Modern Islamism started with the Iranian revolution in 1979, ten years before the *fatwa*. This revolution was a huge success. Nowhere it proved possible to inaugurate a theocratic regime (with a possible exception of Saudi-Arabia), but here, in Iran, the islamists took over and have built a regime that proved sustainable; already for a period of several decades. One of the great successes of the Iranian regime was to introduce a whole new phenomenon which I call “modern hostage taking”.

That brings me to the first part of the title of my talk. This “modern hostage taking”, and its relation to “multiculturalism”, is what I hope to highlight in my talk.

The first “modern hostage” in the sense in which I hope to calibrate the term was Salman Rushdie. He was held hostage in a completely new sense. Khomeini succeeded in making Rushdie a hostage *in his own (i.e. Rushdie’s) country*. And the reason was because Rushdie violated holy blasphemy law. Not the blasphemy law of England, but the blasphemy law of Khomeini: sharia law.

The clash between Rushdie and Khomeini was basically not a clash of two personalities, but a clash of two worldviews. On the one hand there is the secularist, universalist proclamation of human rights as enshrined in modern human rights documents. On the other hand, there is the equally universalist but definitely non-secular worldview of the contemporary islamists. These point of view are basically irreconcilable and in the end one will win.

To get a clear picture of what is the essence of the secularist point of view, let me begin by explaining what I mean with Rushdie's violation of blasphemy law.

It may be helpful to start with some legal provisions which are relevant here, *i.e.* the legal provisions safeguarding freedom of thought and freedom of religion.

First Article 18 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. It states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes *freedom to change his religion or belief*, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. (UN General Assembly 1948; italics added)

The freedom to change your religion or belief is also to be found in other human rights declarations. Article 9 (Freedom of thought, conscience and religion) of the *European Human Rights Charter* says:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes *freedom to change his religion or belief* and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance. (European Union 2012; italics added)

This freedom to change your religion or belief is what I want to highlight here. In my mind, this is tremendously important. Freedom of religion is incomplete without the freedom to change your religion.

Changing your leaders and changing your religion

You may compare it to a similar phenomenon with regard to democracy. Democracy is the freedom to choose your rulers. Now, suppose you have that freedom. But suppose also that once the rulers you have chosen will always remain there. So you choose a ruler in his twenties who will be still there in his eighties: a Fidel Castro type of democracy. We all have the idea, and rightly so, that this type of democracy is not *really* democratic. Democracy as “one man, one vote, *once*” is seriously lacking from a democratic point of view. And so political theorists, like the Austrian philosopher Karl Popper, emphasized that essential for democracy is not only the right to vote your rulers into existence, but also to tell them when it is time for them to go.

In constitutional thought the last dimension is associated with the notion of “ministerial responsibility”. The minister (our ruler) can stay in power *as long as he is held in power by Parliament*. But once Parliament loses its faith in the minister, the minister has to go.

Something analogous we have with the freedom of religion. On the one hand this is the possibility to *choose* a religion of your own choice, but also to *relinquish* this religion, if you want. Freedom of religion is incomplete without these two dimensions.

But this freedom to *change* your religion for another religion, and the freedom to change your religion for no religion at all (so basically to become an *apostate* or an *atheist*) is in jeopardy nowadays. The reason is that what, in human rights language, is called the freedom “to change your religion” is “apostasy,” “atheism,” and “heresy”, according to religious terrorists. And these apostates, atheists, or heretics are to be punished by no less than capital punishment.

If the state fails to apply this sentence, the religiously motivated individual has to step in, and that is precisely what happens nowadays. When the Kouachi-brothers take their Kalashnikov's and force their way into the editorial headquarters of *Charlie Hebdo* to murder the whole editorial staff they simply execute holy law (sharia law). And what the French cartoonists did, or what the Danish cartoonists did before them, was violating divine blasphemy law. The apostate, the blasphemer, or the heretic has to be punished with death. Now, what is new to the contemporary situation of modern hostage taking is that the islamist dictator can make a hostage of Rushdie, the French cartoonists, the Danish cartoonists, or whoever may incur the wrath of the angels of revenge of radical Islamism. In my view, this is a complete new situation. The year 1989 has inaugurated a new era.

The success of theoterrorism

Modern religious terrorism (or "theoterrorism"), more in particular the Islamist kind, makes it difficult, if not impossible, to criticize (radical) Islam (See Cliteur 2013, 15–41; 2012, 127–152). And this is the most serious factor limiting religious liberty in our time.

To avoid all misunderstanding, let me say this: Fundamental rights are not unlimited. All the rights enshrined in the *European Human Rights Charter* have their legal limitations. But traditionally it is the nation-state that determines what these limitations are. In the new predicament it is the islamist terrorist individual (like the Kouachi-brothers, killing the cartoonists of *Charlie Hebdo*), or the islamist organisations and states (like Iran in 1989 or ISIL in our time), who decides where the limits of free speech have to be drawn. And the traditional punishments for blasphemy, apostasy, heresy – they are *de facto* reintroduced in modern nation-states.

So the effective limits of religious liberty are not drawn by nation states, not by ordinary judicial tribunals, but by informal

theoterrorist vigilante groups applying *their* interpretation of religious law in the modern world. This essay tries to develop this issue by explaining how what I call "modern hostage-taking" has developed.

Let me try to explain what I mean by that.

Hostage-Taking in General

A "hostage" is a person seized and brought under the power of another person or organization, usually in order to compel another person or organization (including the state) to do something that would not have been done without this compulsion. There is a long history of political or military use of hostage-taking in which sometimes one organization, or one state, *willingly* brought certain hostages into the power of another organization, or state, as a guarantee of good faith, or in the observance of obligations. This element is clearly included in the definition of "hostage" that we find in *The Oxford Companion to the Law*:

A person, usually of importance, taken from, or surrendered by agreement by one belligerent to another, to be held as security. (Walker 1980, 582)

The Oxford Companion gives us a good definition of what one may characterize as *traditional* hostage taking. For traditional hostage taking the hostage is *taken from* one belligerent camp to another. What characterizes *modern* hostage taking, is that you do not "take from" the other party someone, but you simply issue a verdict on the hostage. And under the conditions we are living now, *i.e.* in a world with open borders and radicalized believers, the effect is the same: the person targeted is in more or less in the same situation as if he were taken away from his country.