



Sandu Frunză, Nicu Gavriluță and Michael S. Jones (Eds.) The Challenges of Multiculturalism in Central and Eastern Europe.

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Recently, the book *The Challenges of Multiculturalism in Central and Eastern Europe* edited by Sandu Frunza, Nicu Gavriluta and Michael S. Jones was published at Provopress, Cluj Napoca. Sandu Frunza, PhD, is Associated Professor and Head of Department of Systematic Philosophy, „Babes Bolyai” University, Cluj, Romania. He is president of SACRI and director of the Center for Religious Studies and Applied Ethics. Nicu Gavriluta, PhD, is Associated Professor in the Department of Sociology and Social Work, Al. I. Cuza University, Iasi, Romania. Michael S. Jones, PhD, is Associate Editor for the Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies and is an advisor to the Seminar for the Interdisciplinary Study of Religions and Ideologies. The volume was sponsored through a grant from the open Society Institute, Bucharest, through the East-East program.

The volume contains the papers presented on the workshop “The Challenges of Multiculturalism in Central and Eastern Europe”, October 28 through 30, 2004, coordinated by Sandu Frunza and Nicu Gavriluta. The workshop was organized by the Center for Religious Studies and Applied Ethics in the Faculty of History and Philosophy, „Babes Bolyai” University, Cluj, by the Faculty of Philosophy of the Al. I. Cuza University of Iasi, Romania and by SACRI. The authors of the articles are scholars from humanities and social sciences and NGO representatives from Bulgaria, Turkey, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Croatia and Romania.

Multiculturalism is a relatively recent endeavor in Central and Eastern European academia. At present, there is a need for approaching the post socialist challenges of multiculturalism and also to re-think the issue of multiculturalism, as it existed “in absentia” during socialism. From a politically proclaimed homogeneity until ‘90s, the Central and Eastern Europe became the place of diversity that sometimes generates cultural and ethnic richness but also conflict; understanding and respect, but also violence and demonization of the otherness.

The concept of multiculturalism entered the Central and Eastern European realm at a stage where its meanings were already highly inclusive in USA, Canada and Australia’s discourses. To a certain extend, the region took over the body of knowledge produced in other cultural settings with regard to multiculturalism and tried to adjust, nuance and elaborate new theoretical distinctions based on its specific experiences. Consequently, the present book is an attempt to fill a gap in a relatively lack of critical research multiculturalism in Central and Eastern Europe.

The book is structured in four parts, covering different aspects of multiculturalism. The first one focuses on broader challenges of multiculturalism:

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globalization, interculturalism and the process of democratic transition. The second part concentrates on religion, multiculturalism and intercultural communication. It examines the role of religion in the dynamic of multiculturalism, interfaith dialogue and human rights in the region, religious communities and syncretism. The third part focuses on issues of identity and ethnicity. The articles explore historical aspects of: multiculturalism in the Ottoman Empire, civil and ethnic identity in Southeast Europe after 1989, Croatian nationalism, issues of cultural diversity in the Republic of Moldova, migration, a diachronic view on multiculturalism in Romania, a case study of cultural diversity in Transylvania, Roma populations in CEE. The fourth part examines issues of social, educational and institutional challenges of multiculturalism. It analyses critical aspects of social assistance of the elderly, of children and of persons with disability, gender communication, poverty and alternatives to anti-globalization in CEE.

The major theme that unifies the papers is a common concern for theoretical delimitations between the main concepts: “multiculturalism”, “multiculture”, “tolerance”, “syncretism”, “synchronism”, “acceptance” and „discrimination” to name only a few. Many papers demonstrate a concern for conflicting topics from the field of multiculturalism. Besides approaching theoretical issues, the papers raise practical concerns toward sensitive debates in the region: How to reconcile the basic human rights with specific cultural practices that contradict them? Where and who should set the limits of tolerance toward harmful cultural practices? To what extent are the universal human rights, universal? What are the practical means in order to replace a deeply

rooted culture of tolerance with one of diversity and multiculturalism? How to replace the culture of “opposition” by the culture of “difference” in order to overcome the ethnic, religious, gender and other cultural barriers? And what are the roles of religion, politics and of civil society in such an endeavor?

The book brings into discussion critical issues of multiculturalism as they pertained the established disciplines of communication studies, history, philosophy, European studies, sociology and education. Moreover, it is especially relevant that the book provides a framework for a new type of interdisciplinary dialogue between emerging disciplines in the region, such as ethnic studies, sociology of childhood and gender studies.

The Challenges of Multiculturalism in Central and Eastern Europe is a convincing demonstration that multiculturalism includes, but is not limited to ethnicity and nationalism, even when these aspects tend to monopolize the common meaning of the term in the region. Besides covering highly debated topics of nationalism, ethnicity, religion, globalization, human rights and intercultural communication, the book includes novel interpretations of social assistance, pathological otherness, development and poverty from a multicultural perspective.

The Challenges of Multiculturalism in Central and Eastern Europe is a successful attempt to conceptualize the theories of multiculturalism based on Central and Eastern European experiences. On the whole, it testifies a local contribution to the international dialogue for a more complex understanding of multiculturalism.