

Pluralism and Radicalization : The Missing Articulation

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Radicalization and religious extremism in western contexts have been extensively studied over the last two decades. Still, a crucial node to look at in thinking about multiculturalism and radicalization is being missed. A massive discrepancy exists between our sophisticated knowledge of what radicalization as pathological outcome of socialization trajectories means, and our complete ignorance of what constitutes radicalization if we consider it as a micro phenomenon starting in the course of ordinary interaction between people who do not know each other. If we wish to get closer to a better understanding of how the reality of pluralism is being experienced by our fellow citizens, we need to forget for a moment big principles and general discourses to get back to practices. The hypothesis here deals with radicalization as a global frame for coping with the way people sharing a common space in a pluralist neighborhood (in a courtyard, on a sidewalk, in a mall, on a playground) feel about and react to the constant exposure to otherness and differences. This matters because it brings us to the unspoken and silent social routine in which hate, love, rejection and isolation start emerging, impacting on social life and eventually degenerating into stronger hostility to people that embody differences. In that perspective, we prevent ourselves from everlasting discussions about assessing whether multiculturalism is right or wrong in its principles, grounding our arguments on artificial connections between on the one hand, the threat of radicalization and extremism, and on the other hand, ideals of justice and equality.

This, in a nutshell, summarizes my feelings while reading an article published by the *Globe and Mail* on April 21. It pointed to ‘distorted multiculturalism’ referring to a public declaration of Ujjal Dosanjh, Liberal MP and past premier of B.C., about Sikh extremism being on the rise in Canada, as he was putting the blame on “the political correctness” of Canadian multiculturalism. This reminded me of the “multiculturalism having gone wild” that has become a key issue since 2001 in the European Union, especially in Great-Britain and the Netherlands. This trend to equate multiculturalism with a series of problems assumingly related to religious diversity has in particular developed following 9/11. The point of this brief comment is not to convince the reader that talking about radicalization of some religious minorities has no relevance in western contexts. The surveillance of a small number of people that preach hatred and encourage violence in the name of any religious message remains a security priority. What I would like to suggest here, however, is an imperative to leave aside the principles and look at practices. In other words, such a move would mean that the articulation of pluralism and radicalization should also be considered primarily as rooted in ordinary and daily routines that deserve at least some attention,

In that perspective, radicalization manifests itself as a reciprocal and relational dynamic, and not exclusively as the outcome of deviant unilateral trajectories of socialization. The emphasis should be put on the responsibility of reciprocal (mis)perceptions and (mis) representations that need to be talked about as they nurture a feeling of hostility among social actors. The necessity to take seriously what ordinary people are experiencing is crucial in understanding the roots of radicalization in a pluralist context. The ordinary unease that arises from the day-to-day interactions between anonymous people creates a continuous daily discomfort which is difficult to label but still appears to me as extremely significant. For instance, when asked in

November 2009 to give their opinion about the building of a mosque inclusive of minarets, Swiss people made it clear: they don't want it. Everyone has still in mind the poster that supported this rejection: a Swiss flag, a woman wearing a black niqab, a mosque with a missile like sprouting minaret. Out of 150 mosques or prayer rooms located in Switzerland, only 4 have minarets, and only 2 more minarets are planned. None conduct the call to prayer. There are about 400,000 Muslims in a population of some 7.5 million people. Close to 90 percent of Muslims in Switzerland are from Kosovo and Turkey. This reality does not coincide with the picture represented on the poster of the populist right. Nevertheless, notwithstanding distance with this reality, Swiss took a radical position by saying no to something that barely exists on their soil.

Where did that rejection come from? For the time being, we can only speculate about that.