

## **BOOK REVIEW**

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### Raphael Cohen-Almagor, *Just, Reasonable Multiculturalism. Liberalism, Culture and Coercion* (Cambridge University Press, 2021)

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The existence of multicultural societies, and thus accommodating cultures that are different from the culture of the majority (or dominant culture), is a contemporary reality. Its roots go back mostly to the 1960s and 1970s, to the period that laid the foundations of our current value system. The spread of the idea of universalism of human rights has changed the thinking about those who were different from us, humanitarian aid has become a major issue, and equality between people and non-discrimination has become a leading idea, too. There was also a growing need to fill the missing workforce. As a result of these changes, Western countries, as opposed to their previous practice of limited and tightly controlled immigration, increasingly opened their gates to migrant workers and those seeking a new homeland. People who previously have not been welcome because of cultural reasons were able to enter and settle in the country much easier than before. These components concluded to the change of the cultural composition of the societies and brought the emergence of public policies that deal with this situation. Instead of the former exclusion or assimilation, solutions have emerged to emphasise and promote social inclusion, e.g. the policy of multiculturalism.

On the one hand, all this has had a number of exciting effects: the fill of the missing workforce and the brain drain have contributed significantly to economic development and prosperity, foreign cultures were so interesting, they opened up the hitherto unknown world to the people, people could enjoy culinary multiculturalism, etc. In general, multicultural policies were a success for years, especially when the different cultures were not yet politically active, did not form a significant community and the diversity was not wide.

On the other hand, what we can see now is that the changes were not entirely under state control. The states (state policies) were inclusive but they did not know what exactly they try to host and whether their own society will be inclusive and adaptive enough. Family reunification has deepened the diversity, illegal migration (and the insufficient fight against it) and the growing ghettoisation have had another negative impact on state control, deepening and widening further the diversity. As a result of this

increasing diversity, habits and traditions that were shocking to the majority society appeared, conflicts arising from cultural misunderstanding increased, and the value system that was inclusive of those culturally different from the majority was questioned.

The solution is yet to come. Faith in equality, freedom of religion and other freedoms provide protection for cultures that are different from the majority (dominant culture), states although prohibit the most unacceptable practices (female genital mutilation, forced marriage, etc.) but in general refrain from community-level solutions, rather deciding on a case-by-case basis who should adapt to whom, through a series of court decisions. Solving problems on individual level is easier, because the general drawing of boundaries at the community level casts the shadow that it contradicts the belief in the values that underpin Western cultures, and Western cultures are not yet ready for a paradigm shift. Ultimately, therefore, the protection of individual rights and the management of public affairs at the community level, also the moral foundations of our system and the need for law and order have come into conflict.

The three main issues in Cohen-Almagor's book – the compatibility of multiculturalism with liberalism, the best-known cultural fractures and security challenges that arise and the question of reasonable balance between accommodation and intervention – also embody these dilemmas. It also follows that the methodology of the book draws clear boundaries and consistently leads the reader to the author's theory of the reasonable limits and applicability of multiculturalism. The author aims to establish a middle ground between liberal reasoning and multiculturalists who see multiculturalism as an alternative to liberalism and who believe that protecting the group's culture trumps otherwise generally applicable laws. He does this by advocating the concept of reasonableness, delineates the boundaries of multiculturalism within the framework of liberal democracy. His fundamental idea is that the state may have justifiable grounds to interfere in the business of illiberal minority cultures when their norms and practices are at odds with the underpinning values of liberal democracy. He differentiates between the reasonableness of a cultural rite on a basis of its significance for the minority culture and of the majority culture: whether it is crucial for the livelihood of the group, it is an integral part of social and family life, perceived as important for maintaining the group's heritage and the way the group defines itself or they have no value for the group, or, as a third case, the cultural rites are of importance to the group but have no value or utility for society at large because they are unreasonable and possibly offensive in the eyes of outsiders. This all actually sheds light on different layers of reasonableness and opens up the possibility of setting general limits to accommodation. At the same time by differentiating between moral reasonableness, legal reasonableness, social reasonableness and political reasonableness, the author also highlights the importance of the different viewpoints as a method. However, this opens up other tensioning problems. Reasonableness also carries a subjective value judgment, we cannot count on it as something objective that is outside and above changes. The main point is that social reasonableness (rationality) ultimately changes together with society, in other words, the capability and will of accommodating others also change, and ever-changing boundaries do not help stability. There are also limits of legal reasonableness. The author refers to the Supreme Court of Canada case law of reasonable accommodation which

can be considered a standard in cultural disputes but although the court can decide that wearing a kirpan under the clothes is not dangerous (*Multani v. Commission*, 2006) but wearing a turban instead of a helmet while motorcycling is (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008), then a legislator can decide otherwise (CBC, 2018), the decision is still within the framework of a legal thinking. The court cannot step its boundaries to take the place of the legislator, it cannot make political decisions, and ultimately it is not the task of the court to decide what should be considered a value (morally) and what should not.

The state, the political power is the only one that is able to take into account and integrate the different types of reasonableness together, thus it cannot spare itself from making a decision. This is what brings us to the practical part of the book where the author analyses different areas of interference of minority affairs. He argues that intervention is justified in the case of gross and systematic violations of human rights, such as murder, slavery, expulsion or inflicting severe bodily harm on certain individuals or groups but he limits the state's immediate control to the most obvious and undisputed matters. Thus, he handles with caution the questions of other disputed matters – rites, patterns, behaviours that are also (heavily) questioned by the majority (dominant) culture – that do not fall under his scope and how (and whether) his just reasonableness test can be used for these cases. He rather argues that the state cannot and should not control everything and we should consider internal restrictions (the right of a group against its own members) and external protections (the right of a group against the larger society), with a case by case investigation.

All things considered, we can certainly agree on that to answer the main challenge of multiculturalism – the recognition of the need for an intervention and the use of reasonableness as a method –, the starting point is to know and understand the field of the intervention, namely the cultural patterns.

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