

## **How Multiculturalism Destroys Human Rights**

- **Valentina Colombo**

Since the late 19th century, the Netherlands developed a uniquely Dutch version of multiculturalism, called "pillarization," with the aim of enabling peaceful cooperation between the leaders of the various "pillars," while their constituents remained largely segregated.

Even if some of these diversities could belong to an intercultural policy, the ones regarding dresses and different codes of law such as sharia definitely lead to a deep and dangerous discrimination towards women.

Multiculturalism can be defined as the acceptance of multiple ethnic cultures -- for practical reasons or for the sake of diversity, and applied to the demographic of specific places: schools, businesses, neighborhoods, cities, or nations.

Multiculturalists advocate extending equal status to distinct ethnic and religious groups without promoting any specific ethnic, religious, or cultural values as central. Government multicultural policies usually include: recognition of multiple citizenship; support for newspapers, television, and radio in minority languages; support for minority festivals, holidays, and celebrations; acceptance of traditional and religious dress in schools, the military, and society in general; support for music and other arts from minority cultures; the study of programs to encourage minority representation in politics and the work force in general; and the acceptance of different codes of law for members of each ethnic group.

"The Multicultural Mistake" and "The Deceit: Victims of Multiculturalism" are the titles of two books: the former published in Germany in 2007 (Ullstein, Berlin), the latter published in Italy in 2010 (Cantagalli, Siena). The authors are two women: Seyran Ates, a lawyer born in Istanbul and raised in Germany, and Souad Sbai, an Italian MP born in Morocco and living in Italy.

Both have worked with immigrant women. Both declare that multiculturalism is a "mistake," a "deceit," and outdated. But mainly both declare that multiculturalism is against women's rights.

Seyran Ates, increasingly stifled by her authoritarian home environment, decided to run away from her family when she was 17, and sought refuge in a women's shelter, where she lived in a community of battered Turkish and German women. In 1984 an ultra-nationalist band of Turkish youths invaded the women's center with guns blazing. Ates was shot in the throat and severely wounded. The woman next to her was killed. It took five years for Ates to recover from the wounds and the trauma of the attack. After this attempt to kill her, she decided that no man had the right to destroy her dream of becoming a lawyer and fighting for women's rights. She decided to stop her activity as a lawyer defending Turkish immigrant women in 2007, only after receiving another death threat. Her engagement with these issues, however, has never stopped; to change the situation in Germany she started to write.

Her book, "The Multicultural Mistake. How We in Germany Can Live Better Together," is a helpful analysis of the situation in her country. Ates considers members of the left-wing, who for a long time hindered any debate, as particularly culpable for the mistakes made in current integration policy. Despite all that their thought aspires to, they never looked closely enough at what was actually happening in these communities and in the cultures that settled in Germany. Ates states that a close look at the third generation shows the results of what Germany has failed to accomplish in the past decades.

It is no surprise, then, that a large part of her book is devoted to women and violence: forced marriages, honor killings and violence in general. Ates writes that "we need to recognize forced marriage as a criminal offense, and in the area of domestic violence we need to acknowledge what has been proven by many studies. The studies show that migrants who are exposed to violence need a different kind of victim protection. They need facilities that respond to their special situation".

As an immigrant who has known on her flesh what integration means and the consequences of a bad model of integration, Ates is firmly convinced that "multiculturalism, as it is practiced today, is just organized irresponsibility: it is an unrestricted tolerance towards the others."

Her words sound like the ones pronounced by most Dutch people a few years ago after the murder of Theo Van Gogh in Amsterdam. They are even more true when referring to a multicultural approach to immigrant women.

Souad Sbai, the Italian MP who has been working for years with immigrant women, is of the same opinion. She notes in the condition of Muslim women in the West the failure of the "multicultural society."

The multicultural deceit, in Souad Sbai's opinion, is a terrible monster embodied in two main phenomena: the use of religion by fundamentalists to pursue their political will and the submission of women; and the abolition of civil liberties and dignity of the human being.

The subtitle of Sbai's book, "Victims of Multiculturalism," identifies the main problem as the abdication of law and political expediency to promote universal human rights while forgetting the centrality and inviolability of the person.

"Victims," referring to women, reminds us of immigrant women in the West, and segregates them into a world of ignorance and violence. But the term has a universal value and the message of her book is that each person of either sex and any religion can be the victim of fanaticism and fundamentalism.

The trick used to sell the idea, she warns, is the use of a distorted democracy: to allow the proliferation of whatever might aim to destroy democracy.

In Sbai's opinion, deceit is the dazzling illusion of multiculturalism: people's refusal to recognize the real nature of ideology and its disastrous consequences -- the promotion of

abstract ideas and ideologies of human rights and universal brotherhood, which soon degenerate into perverse indifference that leads to the eventual denial of rights.

Deceit, then, is the legal and cultural relativism that absolves the guilty and leaves defenseless women beaten, raped, burned, and exploited. Deceit also promotes the belief that these atrocities only concern unfortunate immigrants and do not involve the whole society.

Both Ates and Sbai invite the West to look clearly, without ideology, at the practical effects of immigration and integration, to enable immigrants, in general -- and immigrant women in particular -- to have a chance in their new land.

Another who agrees is Susanna Moller Okin. In a 1999 article, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" she wrote: 'suppose, then, that a culture endorses and facilitates the control of men over women in various ways (even if informally, in the private sphere of domestic life). Suppose, too, that there are fairly clear disparities of power between the sexes, such that the more powerful, male members are those who are generally in a position to determine and articulate the group's beliefs, practices, and interests. Under such conditions, group rights are potentially, and in many cases actually, antifeminist. They substantially limit the capacities of women and girls of that culture to live with human dignity equal to that of men and boys, and to live as freely chosen lives as they can. [...] When a woman from a more patriarchal culture comes to the United States (or some other Western, basically liberal, state), why should she be less protected from male violence than other women are?"

We cannot accept that some women in the West are even more discriminated against than in their homelands.

As Sbai wrote, we cannot let women in Europe "go back to the Middle Ages."

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