Multiculturalism

**Origins:**

The term **multiculturalism** was first used in Canada in the mid-1960s in promoting a diverse, bilingual society.

In the 1970s Australian also described itself as multi-cultural.

Although the term was not used in this context, in the USA the origins of multiculturalism can be traced back to the ‘Back to Africa’ movement led by the radical Marcus Garvey in the early 20th Century and more recently to the civil rights movement in the 1960s with Malcolm X and Martin Luther King.

The 1960s and 70s saw the rise of **ethno-cultural nationalism** in Europe with Scottish and Welsh nationalism in the UK, Basque separatism in Spain and the nationalists of Flanders in Belgium. In this ethic politics was used as a vehicle for political liberation.

***Forces which shaped nationalism*** in the latter half of the 20th century include:

1. Migration (eg from the West Indies to the UK in the 1950s & 60s and across Europe as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union).
2. Globalization (eg the rise of economic migrants).

By the 21st Century most of Europe had embraced multiculturalism and a return to *monoculturalism* was not possible. But there were countervailing forces which played against those who supported multiculturalism, such as the “war on terror” and the rise of religious fundamentalism.

**The meaning of multiculturalism:**

Muticulturalism can be

1. descriptive: i.e., community diversity exists; or
2. normative: i.e., government responses provide a positive endorsement of multiculturalism, it should be encouraged (as with Affimative Action programmes in the USA, eg in housing or education, etc). This can create ***consociationalism*** (power sharing across ethic/religious divides, as in Northern Ireland).

**Is it an ideology?**

This is a good question! It does not provide a single world view (a vision) of an economic, social or political state. Rather, it is a debate between the ***cultural diversity*** and ***civic unity.***

**Core themes:**

1. **Post-colonialism:** a reaction to colonial past. Examples include: Ghandi’s Indian nationalism and non-violent struggle; Franz Fanon’s call to violent struggle in Martinique; and Edward Said’s (an orientalist’s) critique or ***eurocentrism.***
2. **Identity & culture**: this involves raising awareness of cultural differences and advancing the interests of particular groups to combat injustice. People are shaped by social/cultural contexts (***communitarianism***). In this context MacIntyre & Sandel offered a critique of liberal individualism; and Charles Taylor (a Canadian) talks about the need for ‘the politics of recognition’. Culture shapes values and norms – we take pride in our culture and it provides a sense of belonging (or rootedness). Sometimes this is linked to religion or language or ethnicity, as in Welsh Nationalism (which was particularly drive by a desire to preserve Welsh language and culture rather than political demands). In contrast a weakened cultural identity can lead to powerful cultural nationalism, or ‘culturalism’, as recognised by the French philosopher Montesquieu and the father of German nationalism, Herder.
3. **Minority Rights**: Will Kymlicka identified three types:

1) Self-government (eg devolution or the kind of self-governance sought by Native American Indians);

2) Polytechnic Rights: there are legal rights for immigrant groups (eg Muslim girls being excused from some dress codes in schools or Sikh motorcyclists not being required to wear a crash helmet because they wear turbans);

3) Representational rights: this is positive discrimination (eg in public policy).

Minority rights re *collective*, they belong to the group, not the individual (eg, again, Sikh motorcyclists not being required to wear a crash helmet because they wear turbans, or education admissions policy for African Americans in some colleges in the USA).

*Criticisms of minority rights:*

1. sometimes they can block integration (eg arguments in France, and from UKIP, about Muslim women wearing the veil).
2. They can be seen as unfair, ‘favourable’, discrimination.
3. They can cause offence: there can be a tension between the rights of religious groups and freedom of expression (eg Salman Rusdie’s ‘Satanic Verses’ or ‘Charlie Hebdo’).
4. **Diversity**: Multiculturalists believe that diversity creates social cohesion. (this contrasts with the nationalist belief that culture should coincide with citizenship). For multiculturalists a denial of cultural identity can lead to feelings of powerlessness and breed extremism. Cultural identity should be not just tolerated, but celebrated because it is enriching.

Some multiculturalists argue that cultural integration can dilute cultures.

Diversity is good for society (just as biodiversity is seen as good in Ecologism).

**Strands of multiculturalism:**

**Liberal multiculturalism**: argues for toleration and a recognition of cultural and religious traditions. Liberalism is ‘difference blind’.   
BUT: toleration only extends only to views which are also tolerant (eg liberals would not tolerant female circumcision). Here there is a distinction between the public and private realm. In the home diversity is fine (eg in France wearing the hijab is not allowed in public). Liberals would reject a state being based on sharia law.

**Pluralist multiculturalism**: The most extreme example is ***Isaiah Berlin’s*** ‘*value pluralism’* which posits that no moral system is superior to another – we should co-exist in harmony with different views and practices. This is hard to imagine in reality!  
An alternative view of pluralist multiculturalism is proposed by ***Bhiku Parekh*** who believes that diversity expresses what it is to be human (we are all culturally constituted) and our different cultures should be allowed to co-exist.   
Another alternative is **particularist multiculturalism** which proposes the existence of a *plural monoculturalism*. In other words, diversity should exist over civic cohesion.

**Cosmopolitan multiculturalism**: suggests that cultures can learn from each other (Waldron 1995). By integrating we can gain personal development and wider opportunities (eg experiencing African music, Italian food, Japanese art, etc). Humanity exists in a fluid ‘melting pot’. This is the concept of ‘**hybridity**’, mixing together; and it can ultimately lead to a ‘one world’ perspective.

**Critiques of multiculturalism:**

Multiculturalism has been criticised from:

1. An ***anti-immigration*** perspective: (weakening the indigenous culture) eg UKIP; the Front Nationale; Gert Wilders, etc.
2. A liberal perspective: individualism is more important than the collectivism of multiculturalism. Freedom lies in individualism.
3. A conservative perspective: a stable society requires shared values and culture (favouring nationalism).
4. A feminist perspective: some cultures place women in secondary positions in society; they deny women’s rights/lesbianism.
5. A socialist perspective: multiculturalism fails to address the key issue of class inequality.

**The Future?** Is hard to predict. There have recently been countervailing forces to multiculturalism (eg Trump, Brexit, the rise of far right nationalism across Europe), but inevitable continued globalisation may continue to further forge multiculturalism.

*(Notes from Heywood)*