Fathali M. Moghaddam

The Psychology of Multiculturalism, Assimilation, and Omniculturalism

Managing Diversity in Global Context

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If disposing of this product, please recycle the paper.

This book is dedicated to my mother and father, and to the next generation, Nikoo and Guilan.

Series Editors' Preface

Unity in Diversity: Omniculturalism as the Axiomatic Basis for Psychology

Fathali Moghaddam accomplishes a long-awaited axiomatic change in scientific psychology in this little book. He points out that the necessary focus for psychology is not the study of inter-individual differences but exactly their opposite—inter-individual similarities. He proves eloquently how the appealing focus on multiculturalism in psychology—based on the focus on differences between majority and minority groups, or of different societies—are the basis for societal outcomes that psychologists sincerely desire to eliminate. When one finds a difference between two groups (A and B), the particular meaning of the difference is turned from scientific neutrality to ideologically laden evaluation—A is seen not just as *different* from B but *better than* B. This subtle value insertion leads easily to stigmatization of the other group, polarization that leads to conflict, and—eventually—to genocides. This unfortunate potential inherent in psychologists' habitual discoveries of differences is deeply disconcerting, even as a remote possibility. Moghaddam contrasts multiculturalism with omniculturalism. While the former seeks to build an initially non-existent unity from the differences observed, the latter, on the contrary, actively and primarily conceives the unity, to refer to the differences only later (and only if pertinent). Thus, while multiculturalism assumes the challenge of constructing a community that tacitly is presumed to be non-existent, omniculturalism, through a perceptual Gestalt turn, makes the community pre-exist to the group differences that matter to social scientists.

Bad habits are hard to break—especially when these are supported by social norms. The proliferation of statistical methods turned into theory (Gigerenzer, 1991) has turned the discovery of differences into the expected outcome of empirical research. The changing methodological fashions in the twentieth-century psychology—moving away from single-case based phenomenology to large sample research (Toomela and Valsiner, 2010). The normative use of statistical methods to

ascertain differences works precisely against the first step of omniculturalism—the focus on similarity behind the established difference. The statistical paradigm is incapable to focus on similarities. New perspectives—especially qualitative rigorous methodologies (Rudolph, 2013)—need to replace the reliance on statistical generalization. Psychological phenomena are qualitative in their nature, and their quantification is an operation that eliminates the very phenomena by replacing them by what is believed to be their "measures" (Michell, 1999). What we habitually refer to as "measurement" of psychological characteristics entails projection of causal powers into the person without any substantiation. An accumulation of a person's answers on a "introversion scale" is projected into the person—whose shyness in social context is then interpreted as if caused by *introversion* as a supposedly causal entity.

Moghaddam in this book sets up the sequence for omnicultural understanding—first figure out in what ways you are similar to the Other, and *only after that* focus on the features that are different between you and the Other. The focus on similarity helps to understand the universal way of being human—despite all differences, human beings are similar to one another. He does not specify how precisely this unification of the universal core of similarity and the individual specific features takes place. For understanding that process, we need to go back two centuries—and look carefully at the very birth of the dialectical triad of THESIS ➜ ANTITHESIS ➜ SYNTHESIS that was created by Johann Gottlieb Fichte at the time of his entering into professorship at the University of Jena (Fichte, 1794, pp. 35–37). Fichte's crucial role in the development of that triad—and its component of double negation—has been left in the shadow of the dialectical mystifications by Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel during the decades after Fichte had been expelled from academic world of Jena.
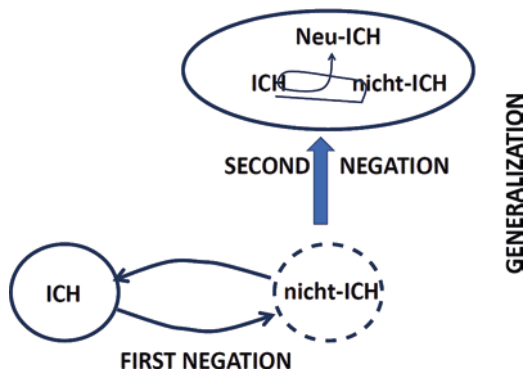

Fig. 1 Fichte's notion of two negations and generalization

Fichte—a talented preacher whose ideas captured student audiences in his few years (1794–1799) in Jena—started from positing the duality of the Self (Ich in contrast with Nicht-Ich) that made it possible to look at similarities and differences. Differently from Moghaddam two centuries later, Fichte started from first discovering the difference (Ich <different from> nicht-Ich). This difference specified the first negation (Ich is not non-Ich). Our psychology that has habitually discovered differences stops at this stage.

Fichte, however, proceeded beyond the first negation. In his concept of second negation, the first negation is negated (e.g., while it is true that Ich <is different> from non-Ich, that difference does not matter). The second negation leads to generalization beyond the first negation, re-uniting the different parts of the Self in the bounded structure that is a new synthesis of the parts (Fig. 1).

Fichte did not develop his theoretical system of double negation further after his exit from academia, and neither have other dialectically minded philosophers after him elaborated that concept. Interestingly, in the present book, Moghaddam uses the process of synthesis in the direction opposite to Fichte's—first discover the similarity (which matters) then add to it the differences. This stems from the general humanistic focus of the author who deeply cares about the never-ending political and societal turmoils that explode all around the World. Unity by conquest that has proliferated in history (Chap. 8) needs to be replaced by unity of feeling into the Other (*Einfühlung*). At this point, Moghaddam's quest for similarities converges with the pluralism originally defended at the end of the eighteenth century by Johann Gottfried Herder—whose work in many ways defined the traits of the antirationalistic thinking of the nineteenth century (Berlin, 1999). Herder did not only accept the multiplicity of cultures, but he also defended their incommensurability, so that it is not possible to understand the values, aesthetics, and customs of an alien culture if applying a standardized cannon. In that case, we could only describe such alien culture by means of negative terms (non-Western, non-rational, non-industrialized, etc.). Every culture ought to be described from within (instead from the outside) if we really wish to understand them as human creations. Similarly, Moghaddam's invitation is to apprehend the Other from the perspective of a similar one, one who has had developed tools (some equal, some different) to surmount the same problems that every human being must face.

Here starts the positive program for human development that builds upon the differences as these feed forward into the unification of the past and future aspirations. Omnicultural contrasts are the basis for proculturation theory (Gamsakhurdia, 2022) which looks at the synthesis of the human mind moving toward the future as part of the "minority group" of migrants.

What unites the two thinkers—Fichte and Moghaddam—across the two centuries and the cultural-historical contexts of Germany and Persia is the focus on the *whole structural unity* of the person. This focus has been lost in psychology over its transformations in the twentieth century, and replaced by elementaristic and

accumulational efforts to re-construct the human mind from elements, not considering the bonds between them that make the systemic (Gestalt) quality of the whole. Omniculturalism is the general framework that restores the primacy of the whole—the human psyche as a system that transforms itself, in constant relating with the environment.

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Preface

We can predict with certainty that societies will become more diverse over the next century, and so the challenge of how to best manage diversity will become more important. In this book, I identify the serious shortcomings of multiculturalism and assimilation, the dominant approaches to diversity management, and put forward omniculturalism as a far better approach.

An ideal is the most practical thing; it moves us to try to improve the world. Omniculturalism presents an ideal that can unite all humanity to work for a better world, using as a point of departure the simple fact that humans are in foundational ways far more similar to each another than they are different. In a world where human similarities are given priority and celebrated, and differences are assigned a secondary role, we become more inclined to treat everyone as members of one group, humanity. Omniculturalism best incapsulates the interests and needs of both minority and majority groups.

Multiculturalism has served minority group elites very well, but it has failed to benefit non-elite minority group members. This reality is reflected in the plight of non-elite minority populations, especially in domains such as educational performance, political power, and material wealth. Neither has multiculturalism benefited majority group members, who in general have ended up feeling ambivalent toward multiculturalism. Assimilation has for the most part benefitted majority groups, but not minority groups. In contrast, omniculturalism will benefit all humanity and represents an ideal to guide our future actions.

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Acknowledgment

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