Thematic Article

A lifespan and beyond
– Essay in honor of Wolfgang Mitter

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Abstract

The essay traces some features of change in general, and specifically its acceleration and possible steerability but also the risk of protracted liminality. Education, and, facing ongoing globalization, especially comparative education, plays a paramount role to cope with change and its challenges. The dialectics of change are most likely not following the nice idea of progressing rational self-manifestation of the absolute idea in an orderly triad movement, but can take surprising twists and turns, and the final round is open. Nor is education automatically contributing to create a better world. Some irritating developments in today's society and in academia might be omens of coming problematic divides.

Keywords: modernity, globalization, liminality, incertainty, comparative education

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I. Introductory remarks

Wolfgang Mitter was not only my mentor in the field of comparative education science but also an elder friend. As the head of department for International and Comparative Education he invited me in 1974 to collaborate with him in his team in the German Institute for Comparative Educational Research in Frankfurt which he later on headed as director for many years. He encouraged me, initially a graduate of linguistic and literature studies, to immerge into the field of comparative education. For him the fundament of the discipline was a deep interest in the cultural, political and economic context of education theory and praxis, based on empirical data and intercultural comparison as a method of gaining new knowledge. This approach corresponded fully with my own research intentions and my personal and my academic background, and I felt immediately comfortable with it. With gratitude and a sense of delight I remember so many occasions of extensive and deep discussions be it in the whole research group, be it in more personal meetings and get togethers with Wolfgang Mitter.

Commemorating Wolfgang Mitter and the time of common research, I realize the changes that happened in society and education research over the years. Change in society and even in technology was somewhat slower than today. In the post-war period Europe rather tried to recover, and the West-German political and social climate for many years was typically represented by the slogan of Christian Democratic Union: "no experiments!" The students of the youth movements in the late 1960ies and 1970ies shouted revolutionary slogans, but they lastly ended up in a long march through the institutions. They were often successful in their personal careers, but certainly not forwarding revolution. The collapse of the Communist bloc, a really tremendous and surprising event in the moment when it happened, was at the first glance not a real substantial change. It simply brought the end to a long lasting antagonistic and static confrontation, and stood for the victory of the established Western democratic and capitalist system. This applies also for the educations system change. Eastern Germany copied the Western German model entirely. The education systems in Europe gradually developed into a system of common values and principles and tend – with different speed – towards standardization (Horner, Dobert, Reuter & von Kopp, 2015). This all is not to say that there were no changes at all, but probably the changes to come sooner or later will be more eruptive, deeper and wider ranging.

In the following I draw attention on some features and interpretations of change itself, and after that I will have a look at some trends which might be omens of greater changes to come. Observing a fast growing polarization in society, a rapid decline of public political language, a rapid disappearing of meaning and sloganization of terms like "critical thinking" and "tolerance", I cannot but remember and admire, how tolerant and fair and critical was Wolfgang Mitter, and since his academic accomplishments were honored at many other occasions, I should like to stress here also these personal merits. It is not by chance that in his popular lectures he gave for students of Frankfurt

University one could often find a majority of students with migration background. With their background they were especially sensible for his noble and tolerant character being absolutely unable to discriminate someone for social background, race, religion or political convictions, being eager to learn from their experiences and contributions, open to critical thinking and always seeking to bridge differences without giving up his own convictions. I miss personally, but also in view of the present climate in society generally his generous and cosmopolitan and critical liberality.

II. Change in times of modernity

Nature and human society are constantly exposed to slower or faster change, affecting larger or smaller areas more or less radically. Change in itself as a neutral constant of life is not in itself problematic. But generally maladaptation to change results in serious problems. Change in our modernity has gained an unprecedented speed, and this speed – even a constant speeding up – seems to be a constituent character of modernity. It has delivered us many technical and cultural achievements we do not want to miss. On the other hand this progress is creating constantly more and more complex problems which are increasingly demanding material resources and brainpower. Thus progress is heading towards a drastically declining productivity of economic, sociocultural and infrastructural complexity and thus a declining of marginal returns (Tainter, 1988). Generally "in its neoliberal form, its ideological self-presentation is one of liberating the forces of creative destruction, setting free ever-accelerating technological and social innovations" (Williams & Srnicek, 2013). This neo liberalism is based on the believe in an "invisible hand", assuming that in the end the anonymous self-steering forces solve the problems of the present civilization. However, "in this visioning of capital, the human can eventually be discarded as mere drag to an abstract planetary intelligence rapidly constructing itself from the bricolaged fragments of former civilisations" (ibid.).

The "invisible hand" of speeded up neo-liberal modernization was analyzed and challenged recently in a radically critical leftist "manifesto for an accelerationist politics" (ibid.). Diagnosing the notorious risks of our modernity, the "breakdown of the planetary climatic system… terminal resource depletion… collapsing economic paradigms… and new hot and cold wars" cannot be handled with the hitherto used instruments of steering and governance: "In contrast to these ever-accelerating catastrophes, today's politics is beset by an inability to generate the new ideas and modes of organization necessary to transform our societies to confront and resolve the coming annihilations. While crisis gathers force and speed, politics withers and retreats. In this paralysis of the political imaginary, the future has been cancelled" (ibid). Acceleration in the sense of the manifesto, is not merely a speeding up: "The process of liberation can only occur by accelerating capitalism's development, without however (and this is important) confusing acceleration with speed: acceleration here operates as an engine, as an experimental process of discovery and creation, within the space of the possibilities emanating from capitalism itself" (Negri, 2014).

The manifesto's vision of "acceleration" is goal-oriented, future-oriented, knowledge-oriented and organization-oriented. The latter aspect of organization, power and governance tries to amalgamate classical socialist visions of planning with the economic and emancipatory potential of capitalism, but at the same time promises to evade the notorious antiproductive and antidemocratic legacy of historic socialist models. The envisioned organizational form of acceleration has nothing to do with the new leftist refusal of vertical structures and the philosophy of a radical horizontalism: "The fetishisation of openness, horizontality, and inclusion of much of today's 'radical' left set the stage for ineffectiveness... We need to posit a collectively controlled legitimate vertical authority in addition to distributed horizontal forms of sociality, to avoid becoming the slaves of either a tyrannical totalitarian centralism or a capricious emergent order beyond our control. The command of The Plan must be married to the improvised order of The Network" (Williams & Srnicek, 2013).

The accelerationist project, planning to use the potential of liberating cognitive power and its productive forces, relies categorically on education and the new kind of highly educated specialists: it "insists on the material and technical nature of a reappropriation of fixed capital understood as tangible, in which productive quantification, economic modeling, big data analysis, abstract cognitive models, etc., are appropriated through education, and through the scientific re-elaboration of these forms by worker-subjects" (Negri, 2014). Whatever we think about the details of the outlined neo-Marxist "manifesto", it is clearly breaking open the crustifications of many prevalent boring and self-circling mainstream debates about the reasons of crisis and the possible or necessary societal change, and at the same time it is linked with the historical core legacy of the socialist project, which after the end of Cold war has repeatedly been declared to be dead.

Interestingly, in its reliance on technological progress, its general attitude towards civilizational change as an actively steerable undertaking and a general positive notion of technology and future, the "manifesto" approximates – or rather is an answer to – tendencies we can find among today's supercapitalists and their prophets from the Silicon Valley who boost the digital revolution, like Bill Gates, Ray Kurzweil and others. They apparently see themselves to be beyond the point of merely making more money, which does no longer give them any substantial added value. This added value they seek individually – and this point distinguishes them fundamentally from the neo-Marxist acceleration project – to influence the direction of technological and societal progress to some meaningful purpose. These activities in reality seem to be far more pretentious than what a headline recently called a "philanthropists race among billionaires" (Medick, 2015). In the contrary: "The masterminds of the Valley make no secret of their plans. They say completely openly: We want to shape the world according to our ideas. They are convinced that the technological revolutions in the past years were not more than an overture." (Schulz, 2015.)

The neo-Marxists of the manifesto will probably have more problems with steering because they want to control capital and production, the Valley *is* the Capital and the production. We thus see three relevant models towards future – not taking into account the anti-technologists – which will certainly for the next time count on accelerated technological progress: The neo-Marxists, the Valley capitalists, and the neo-liberal believers in the invisible hand.

Whereas the neoliberals gate out planning and steering, the Manifesto and the Valley visionaries tend to gate out the complexly layered psychology of society which accumulated over time and as a system is rooted in structures and layers more or less deeply hidden under the visible surface of cultures and civilizations. This psychology is not easily "steerable". The deeper structures accumulate the whole load of history, a complex stock of old piled up experiences, manners and beliefs, values, knowledge, but also collective nightmares, rites, and narratives. The upper levels generally feed in a more erratic and more volatile way the visible side of change. They constantly interfere with the surface processes, they trigger experiments and play with given ideas, practices and solutions, discard old and create new ones, clean up, restore and change appearance and images, perceptions, ideologies, and spirits of given civilizational periods. This experimental and selective playing, some planned, some as trial and error activity, is necessary in face of the need for society to constantly adapt to the challenges of a changing world on the one hand and handling the huge overload of piled up complexity of the society's memory and to link it meaningfully to the cultural and technological changes on the other hand.

Speaking about civilizational and cultural change, especially about rapid and dramatic or revolutionary change, we incline to interpret it as something happening within a very short time and all of a sudden. Very often this is not really the case. Outburst of change can develop for a long time hidden in the deep structures similar to earthquakes, slowly preparing "sudden" explosions. Even seemingly sudden societal change, such as revolutions, may "mature" over longer periods of time, and in history deep changes sometimes started in tiny contexts not expected to create substantial change, and some great civilizations and empires took off from what were marginal peripheries on the political and economic world map of the given time.

Great historical changes are labeled with various names and described with concepts such as "gaps", "divides", "revolutions" etc. Alvin Toffler's description of the developing modernity as "wave" for example, suggests a substantial hiatus which stands in a row with the most basic civilizational transformations of history. As he sees it, today we face the dawn of a third form of civilization which follows the first (agrarian) and the second (industrial) ones (Toffler, 1980). Peter F. Drucker concentrates on more frequent, less deep but nevertheless very dynamic "divides" and compares the present one with transformations like the Renaissance, the invention of book printing, the First Industrial Revolution etc.: "Every few hundred years in Western history there occurs a sharp transformation. We cross in... a 'divide'. Within a few short decades, society rearranges

itself – its world view, its basic values; its social and political structure; its arts; its key institutions" (Drucker, 1993, p. 1). Joseph Tainter studies the question why civilizations collapse, and he applies a model of the growing costs of building complex systems which tend to accumulate to an unbearable level (Tainter, 1988).

Education as a system is involved intimately in the processes of civilization change. It acts, among others, in its own manner, as a link between the deep and the surface structures. It secures the dialogue and the intergenerational relative stability as well as hostility towards or acceptance and acceleration of innovation. Thus it contributes to the constant adaption as well on the personal as also on the collective levels of societies, and it secures a "dialogue" between those levels. Since large scale societies are generally unstable, at times less at times more, pedagogy as a system is particularly labile. But in traditional societies too, the ruptures between collective and personal transformations and transitions can come to surface, as is expressed in the often quoted outcry ascribed to Socrates: "The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers" (Bartleby).

In contrary, today, society seems to favor youth culture. The topic of the "white male", especially he old one as being associated with political and economic power, as the image of an utmost reactionary attitude (and the evil in world history) was originally highly popular in Western gender studies, but has outgrown this discipline and has penetrated the common politically correct academic and non-academic discourse. Even in the context of the recent public immigration and refugee debate in Germany it became popular to picture critics of the governmental policy as the "angry old men" respectively the "enraged white-haired citizens" as the ambassadors of populistic and reactionary attitudes. The German journalist and honorary professor of philosophy Richard David Precht and the sociologist Harald Welzer thus consequently see the "refugee crisis" discussion as "dominated by elder intellectuals who fuel fear", and they head their article with the slogan: "Youth to power" (Precht & Welzer, 2016).

III. Liminality, incertainty, and Comparative Education

In much more traditional and small-scale societies than those of the Greece at the time of Socrates, we do not find similarly established education, but of course transfer of knowledge, skills, narratives and belief from one generation to the next in various forms. Although not being something like "systems of education", transmission proceeds in situationally varying and open, but also in strictly constructed patterns. Certain transitions in the course of life must be executed by applying traditional and unchangeable rites and guidance. Anthropology describes the phases of those transitions as "rites of passage". The passage from youth to adulthood is only one example. There can be many more transitions: from one group to another, from one

societal status to another, and finally, from life to death. The phase of transition between the before and the after, in anthropology was named "luminal" (from Latin "limen": threshold). Used already in the late 19th century, it was the anthropologist Victor Turner who 'rediscovered' the term in the 1960ies, elaborated and systematized it, still limiting its use to small-scale societies (Turner, 1964). The liminal phase in small scale societies typically suspends ritually and under the guidance of an elder person for a certain time the normal order, opening a space of chaos and uncertainty which must be gone through. The liminal phase ends up in a new order and new status and role pattern. Liminal phases, for instance the ritual passage from childhood to adulthood, enable societies to give meaning, structure to and control over substantial and potentially problematic transitions in the life of the individual and in societies. Thus the collapse of order allows the creation of a new order.

Since Turner's first studies, the concept of "liminality" found its way into various disciplines studying large-scale modern societies. In these, the collapse of order is not guided and non-intentional, but is a part of change. There are no prepared or guided ways out of the liminal phase in due time. Only learning and adaptation could help to eventually find possible exits. But societies do not "learn" easily. A 'protracted transition' is usually seen as risky and dangerous. The sociologist Arpad Szakolczai described the history of communism as such a liminal protracted, "frozen transition" as a system of passage without exit, circling all the time, again and again, within its own limits and lack of adaptiveness (Szakolczai, 2000). In psychology protracted phases of permanent liminality and basic uncertainty on the individual level tend to evoke "mimetic" behavior: "A central characteristic of liminal situations is that, by eliminating the stable boundary lines, they contribute to the proliferation of imitative processes and thus to the continuous reproduction of dominant messages about what to copy" (Horvath, 2009, S. 55). This is not without risks: Without stable institutions – which are effectively broken down in a liminal period – "people will look at concrete individuals for guidance" (Szakolczai, 2009, p. 154). Tis guidance-seeking can be easily manipulated and abused.

Recent progress in communication technology, the constant connectedness – preferably among youth – via smartphone and soon to come via a smart environment, has pushed this power of mimesis to a new level. Now technology provides the possibility of instant and constant connectivity which multiplies the potential of "copyism" substantially. The new social media in the internet are the perfect communality area for continuous checking and co-creating pools of dominant messages. The tools of collating users to visited sites, initially developed for economic purposes, has expanded to personal spheres, creating separate worlds of self-referential, simple, and polarized ("like" – "dislike") and emotionalized spaces of homogenous information and values full of "followers", "emojis", and "emoticons". The internet, which the sociologist Heinz Bude characterizes in contrast to the traditional media like newspapers, as "an inordinate atmospheric universe" (Bude, 2016, p. 122), thus provides us with a well suited environment for mimetic copyism as a strategy to handle tentatively protracted

liminality. Liminality is but one of many constructs of explanation some features of change, though an interesting one by taking into consideration the deep rooted connections between individual and collective processes, between rational and non-rational spheres, surface and deep structures of society. In face of the characteristic loss of order and certainty, modernity generally can be interpreted as a "protracted liminality".

The growing incertitude in our modern society obviously has permeated all spheres of society and has found extensive notice by scholars of very heterogeneous disciplines. Also in comparative education theory, scholars pointed to the "collapse of certainty" (Welch, 1999), and called for designing an "education for uncertainty" (King, 2000, p. 268). Initially, modern comparative education profited from the globalization shift which accelerated in the 1970s and 1980s. Among others, the enlarged pool of knowledge on context and functional conditions of education systems from all possible regions of the world, promised to make school a factor of societal change, and to help making a better world soon. UNESCO in the 1980ies declared that by the year 2000 there would be no child left behind without schooling and in illiteracy. Today we know that although much has been accomplished, we are far from having fully reached this objective quantitatively and much less qualitativel. Schooling is endangered or suspended in many conflict regions and school children often are first victims. In the first line girls are often deprived of their right for education. Ultra conservative religious, notably Islamic, movements, oppose in some countries education of girls or fight modern education by even murdering children and teachers. Recently UNICEF reported that Boko Haram impeded last year the functioning of more than 2.000 schools in Nigeria and its neighboring countries, preventing thus school attendance of more than one million children (FAZ, 2015).

Apart from this, today alphabetization as such is only one of the unconditional prerequisites for improving life in modern society. An education certificate per se does not at all automatically free the individual from restrictions as is illustrated in the following story, published some years ago in a newspaper report about Afghanistan: "The most important outcome of education is that girls learn to oppose forced marriage" emphasizes a woman teacher who was forced into marriage in the age of 15, but, as she points out, even "12 years old brides are not seldom to be found", and this generally means no more schooling. Her 18year old teacher colleague, however, had successfully fended off an imminent forced marriage still being a child. "I needed the money", said her father, himself a teacher, because he hoped to get bride money which at that time was Euro 3.000 in average. But his daughter did not give in. "Now there is no longer a necessity to marriage her" says her father laughing: "Now I get her salary" (Boge, 2007).

Nevertheless, and in spite of drawbacks, evidently education plays a paramount role. In face of today's rapid globalization particularly the discipline of Comparative Education, in its nature dealing with different cultures and systems, is predestined to play an important and innovative role.

From its very beginning the discipline is inquisitive and open for other systems and cultures, but also somewhat ambiguous. Jacqueline Gautherin, sketching the life and the work of the "founding father" of the discipline, Marc-Antoine Jullien, called Jullien de Paris (1775–1848), speaks about the "shaky construction of Julien's 'science of education', which is indeed a curious piece arranged for several voices, that of the *honnête homme* confident of the progress of reason, that of the former revolutionary interested in social and political change, that of the administrator concerned with efficiency and rationality, that of the amateur scientist and that of the traveler curious to observe the minutiae of school life. This 'science of practical utility'... is not only torn between a concern for specifics and the requirements of universality or between anthropological realities and lofty generalizations, dichotomies... but also hesitates between disparate formal schemata and cannot make up its mind between 'knowledge', will and action" (Gautherin, 1993). As for the inconsistencies of a "curious piece arranged for several voices", this might be seen as a birth defect, which tears apart the envisioned discipline. But we should certainly also take into consideration that this polyphonic nature of several voices is not necessarily the consequence of a basic antagonism, but perhaps an intuitive anticipation of a unique new and challenging multifocal and multidisciplinary view on education, whose potential today can and should be developed further. Without this ambiguity the field can hardly develop its full opportunities and be a possible guide through the liminality of growing complexity and instability of modern society and education (von Kopp, 2010).

Apart from its validity of academic research, comparative education as a teaching discipline provides to a high degree "the kinds of skills that individuals who face directly the challenges driven by changes in the global order need to have – 'how to think and act flexibly and strategically, how to move readily from one project or region to another, how to grasp a new situation quickly, and how to start solving pragmatic problems" (Epstein, 1997, 118). Perhaps still more important: Comparative Education could have the potential and the function to become a "relevant voice of criticism and dissent in face of the distortions of globalization" (Torres, 2001: VIII). Thus Comparative Education should play a crucial role in helping to resume and pass on the heritage of the critical and emancipatory idea of humanistic education. Unfortunately, this idea is permanently threatened, and it is a bad sign that so many of the central terms of an emancipatory pedagogy like "flexibility" too often in reality mean for many young occupied, namely in the academia, a protracted, underpaid, or even unpaid, work as freelancers or "voluntary interns".

IV. The noble objective of political correctness and the dialectics of change.

The demand to foster "critical thinking" in school has become such a matter of course in most modern school systems that the degree of draining all content of this void formula, does not attract much, if any, attention. The presently dominant techniques of measuring school success in form of homogenized large scale assessments of test

performance like Pisa, overshadow the question of what critical thinking is, what kind of critical thinking we wish to foster, how to teach it and how to find out if and to what extend the education system performed well in this matter or not. As for the higher education sector, skeptical voices concluded, that the ongoing homogenization and marketization of higher education in Europe in many respects ended up in lowered standards and impeded the development of critical thinking. The sociologist Richard Munch in comprehensive studies revealed how in many cases the new criteria of evaluating and certifying higher education institutions are not primarily based on the scientific or pedagogical quality, and partly even contradict the rules and principles formulated by the institutions themselves (Munch, 2007 and 2009). Many studies and many members of the academia blame the whole machinery of evaluating and certifying, of tightening the curricula and of other measures of "modernizing" the university for creating an atmosphere of mediocracy. A recent combat writing by literary scholar und philosopher Armen Avanessian – a representative of the above mentioned accelerationist movement – is most outspoken: For him "university, which he also calls a "retirement mansion of critical thinking", is a monstrous, publicly supported 'obviation factory', desperately clinging to the myth of 'critical thinking' out of existential fear and without realizing that 'critical thinking' itself long since has become a commodity which is bartered for real money via third party funding proposals" within a system of "academic omertà" (Diez, 2014; Avanessian, 2014). Avanessian denounces this "bugaboo of 'critical thinking'", as a criticism which only confirms its "bossiness establishing for its own benefit only fields of work and of knowledge and patterns of thinking, which are adaptable to such forms of "criticism'." For him this "secondary thinking" results in "depression" and in "mediocracy", and "it explores and acknowledges only things that have been explored already since long ago" (Dietz, 2014).

Today we find the devaluation of critical thinking even in movements which originally started criticizing and to break the encrustation of the 1950ies and 1960ies, fighting against intolerance, racism, exclusion, and marginalization of minorities. Especially the academic institutions played in this movement a paramount role. Most of us growing up in these times, were educated in this atmosphere and we made these goals to ours. On the scholarly level various facets of theoretical relativism, constructivism, theoretical postmodernism etc. enriched and systematized those attitudes. This endeavor for positive change was – though certainly not at once and to different degrees – widely accepted as mainstream. In this context internationalization and globalization could be seen as a promise for more openness and international and intercultural communication and the external condition for building a better world. Unfortunately, real-life globalization has not delivered its promises. Today not only confirmed pessimists see that – unfortunately – globalization has not led us into to the world of Francis Fukuyama predicting the "end of history" as the definite victory of a liberal democratic order after the end of the Cold War, but into that of Samuel Huntington's more pessimistic visioning of a possible "clash of civilizations" (Fukuyama, 1992; Huntington, 1993).

Other than some eruptive changes, the twists of the antidiscrimination movement came on tiptoe. Since some time we can see an increasing and alarming tendency to radicalize the issues of fetishizing minorities to a degree which – in a weird kind of dialectics – is seriously harassing members of other minorities and of majorities. The ideological basis of emancipation and liberality themselves and with it the emancipatory discourse are eroding. In this context sometimes even the concept and the term of "tolerance" is no longer tolerated. In the field of academia we have alarming news about a veritable "culture war", so far mainly in US-American and in British universities, but progressing elsewhere. Growing numbers of student activists fight for enforcing rules of a new political correctness in the academic world. The British Guardian summarized this trend in a headline: "Free speech? Not at four in five UK universities" and specified: "According to research by online magazine Spiked 80% of universities have restrictions on free speech" (Tickle, 2015).

The following examples are taken from two articles, one of them written by a German teacher at an US-American college, who decided better to remain anonymous (DIE ZEIT, 2016; Buchsteiner, 2016; Dunt, 2015).There are four battlefields od strategic thrust: *Cultural appropriation,* meaning that members of a "privileged majority" must not use cultural mental or material assets of cultural or racial minorities and transpose them into another cultural sphere. Consequently for example in Obelin College the restaurant gave in to activist pressure and withdrew sushi and other "appropriated" and thus falsified and offensive "exotic" food from its menu. Erika Christakis, a Child psychologist at Yale university was attacked because she refused to sign a request by a university committee warning students not to wear at Halloween "cultural appropriative" costumes like sombrero hats, native American dress etc. The activists argued that their campus must be a "*safe place*" – another combat slogan – were nobody would be offended, and asked for her dismissal. The pressure continued until she herself resigned and left the college. Another severe offence is in the politically correct newspeak labeled as "*microaggression*". In German sometimes the similarly eccentric term "passively aggressive" is used. In order to be blamed of "macroaggression" it is not even necessary that the committer willingly wanted to offend or even could have known what and why something was offensive. The main problem with this term is that it is completely vague and discretionary. This notwithstanding, the general pressure of the new political correctness activists was for instance strong enough to make the representative of the University of California teaching staff to write an open letter to the faculty members asking to avoid in their teaching any "microaggressive expression". The letter gave examples of microaggressive sentences like: "The most qualified person should get the job", because this allegation would support the myth of meritocracy and ignore the factor of gender or race in a job searching situation. Banned should be also: "The US is a melting pot" and even: "there is only one race and this is the human race". They are taboo because allegedly such statements (especially coming from a white person) would deny the significance of racial origin in society. The "*safe place*" policy's aspect of preventing dissenting opinion comes with the slogan and the policy of "*no platform*",

that is, not allowing unwanted speakers public presentations. At the Goldsmith institute in London, for example, the Iranian human right activist Maryam Namazie was forced to stop her speech against the persecution of bloggers and inhuman punishment in some Islamic countries, thus allegedly violating the "safe space" of Muslim students. Curiously enough, the activists were supported by the homosexual and lesbian activist fractions. On the other hand this is not so surprising since the political and cultural Islam is similarly exclusive and dictatorial as are the mentioned student activist movements and a kind of thought police. The radical British feminist Julie Bindel was attacked as being not only "islamophobic" but also "transphobic" and even – a quite new term: "whorephobic", and banned from speaking at University of Manchester by the school's student union and "she now finds it increasingly difficult to get on to college campuses at all" (Dunt, 2015). Since "phobia" initially is a medical term, the inflationary usage and the undercurrent meaning of being insane if not being in line is disquieting.

The "safe place" philosophy also requires, that students must be warned before being confronted with teaching contents which possibly could offend or shock them. Music, song texts, novels, but also nonfiction can be "disturbing". The keyword for correct behavior of the teacher in case of possible offense is "*trigger warning*". Practically all elder texts studied in seminars on literature can – and in the eyes of the activists: will – contain parts and depictions which are potentially disturbing or shocking. A school text editor preparing a new edition of Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason put the warning on the front page of its new edition "that before parents allow their children to read this book they better should talk with them about how deeply the view on themes like race, sexual role, sexuality, ethnicity and interpersonal relations have changed since the time this book was written". For similar reasons – to "protect the students" – the London University College prohibited the activities of a "Nietzsche Society". Apparently the growing pressure of attempts to regulate what can be said and what not, who may speak and who not, is certainly not promoting critical thinking which is seen to be a cornerstone of academic culture. "Instead of producing confident students who can handle any argument you throw at them, universities are a production line for cowed conformists. Instead of being free spaces where ideas can be debated without restraint, universities have become like the private and public bureaucracies the young will go on to join: speak out of turn, or even wear the wrong T-shirt, and the bosses will make you suffer" (Cohen, 2013). He summarized his message in the headline: "Universities should be the last place to ban free speech" (ibid.).

One of the changes that came recently, seemingly "out of nothing", to the surface in various countries, is the new polarization in political action, communication and argumentation. Perhaps it is a byproduct of the often registered social polarization which is apparently fast progressing. The quality of debate is different from "habitual" democratic, often fierce confrontations and quarrels over political issues. It developed in various contexts and was triggered by different persons or events. The most prominent person representing the new style of polarization is probably Donald Trump in the US.

The trigger for unlashing polarization in Germany (or as for that: in Europe) was the "refugee crisis".

When in 2015 the German chancellor Merkel – with a solitary decision, without consulting the other European countries but rather steamrolling them – started her adventurous and voluntarist policy of opening the borders for a completely uncontrolled immigration, it was quite normal that this would provoke dissent. Since there was no plan, although the refugee and immigration flood did not come all of a sudden and policy in this respect had not moved for years, considerable parts of people, including even many of those with immigrant roots themselves, were alarmed. The conditions and implications of such a massive and uncontrolled immigration were however not discussed. "Welcome culture" is a heartwarming term but it must not serve to oppress discussion and to veil political incompetency, chaos and bypassing democratic procedures. The problem however, was not immigration a such. The "crisis" came in a moment, when we had reached over the years in Germany a strong public support for the culture of integration, not the least by seeing the generally successful integration over the last decades. True, in Germany there was and is the danger of racism and neo-nazism – which, by the way, for years could and should have been fought against far more consequently then it was – but it certainly was not a mass movement. However, now we had apparently a completely different situation, and something remarkable happened: Those who criticized the policy of Merkel, were in the public discussion immediately and extremely harshly and collectively and without distinction and differentiation attacked and stigmatized as right wing, if not racists and neo-Nazis, and the previous broad consensus eroded. The attitude of "who is not on my side is against me" in such a consequent stiffness was new. To denounce all those who do not follow the official line in the question of immigration and Islam fueled extremism. Even the language in public discussions lost sometimes control. Critical voices were denunciated in one example as coming from a "great coalition" stretching from street protests to "smear campaigns from the lounge bar writers of FAZ, Welt and Cicero" (Kohlmann, 2016) – all three renowned newspapers. The next example is still more disquieting: The renowned specialist on ancient Roman history, Alexander Demandt was asked to contribute on the theme of migration to the bimonthly periodical "Die politische Meinung", which is edited by the "Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung", the political cultural foundation of the Christian Democratic Union, chancellor Merkel's party. Demandt wrote about immigration and the end of the Roman Empire. The journal refused to print his article claiming that "in the present political situation it could be misinterpreted". The article in the meantime was published in another periodical, but a bitter aftertaste remains (Demandt, 2016).

The officially propagated and demanded exaltation for a blind "welcome culture", the tabooing of discussion and critique together with an initial concealment of negative news related to criminal acts committed by refugees and immigrants, and examples of self-censorship, nurtured in a large part of the public the suspicion that the government

and the media were not telling the truth about the situation. Examples of self-censorship in the media and the new hostility towards critique is always an alarming signal because it fights any opposition, not only the extremist one.

We should be also alert in respect to our support of any political correctness, because as was shown in the examples from the new movements in universities, the "dialectic of change" cn be tricky. A major NGO in Brussels The "European Council on Tolerance and Reconciliation" – ECTR, elaborated the proposal for "A European Model Law for the Promotion of Tolerance and the Suppression on Intolerance" to be adopted in all EU member states. Every good willing person will agree with the principle that all kinds of mentioned discrimination must not be tolerated. But the text proposes some measures we should consider very carefully. Those are: the call to oblige all mass media and public and private educational institutions to give regularly a certain room to inform about and train these attitudes, to regard hate speech, group libel and slander as a criminal act punishable as aggravated crimes, the obligation that juveniles convicted of committing correspondent crimes will be required to undergo a rehabilitation program conducive to a culture of tolerance, to grant (acknowledged) minority groups automatically a preferential treatment – for instance unconditional free legal aid to the victims of correspondent crimes – and last but not least to establish a National Tolerance Monitoring Commission (ECTR, 2015). Again: The refusal of discrimination is an absolutely noble objective. But a general vagueness as for what is exactly hate speech and what not, including the fact that easily whatever can be declared to be a "phobia", as the above mentioned examples from the PC activist movement in universities illustrate, and lastly the creation of a supervising commission which can, under changed political conditions, easily and quickly turn into an Orwell-like ministry of thought control and a thought police, is not very attractive.

V. Concluding remarks

In my essay I highlighted some problematic trends that might be seen as symptoms of coming big changes – which hopefully will be rather those of Toffler's divides than a collapse in the sense of Tainter. It seems impossible to foresee, even only in general lines and even for the near future, how the problems I touched upon could possibly be handled effectively and decently. Fanaticism, in the name of exclusiveness as well as in the name of inclusiveness and of whatever other "holy principle", and possibly further waves of immigration, perhaps manifold larger than the ones we experience today in Europe, will lead to more and more diversity. Today in Germany it is generally propagated as inevitable and desirable to integrate as quickly as possible this huge diversity into one common cultural economic and political inclusive space. The emergence of "parallel societies" is seen as a substantial thread to our societies, and "integration" – giving education a central role in this project – is presented as the only solution. But the objectives and the content of a European, or as for that a German, a French etc. "integration" are completely vague and obscure. Studying the existing

concepts of "integration" without parallelism in this context and in the last consequence can only mean to make the "others" like "us" – and we even do not know clearly, what is this "us" - respectively to make them to a willing and unproblematic workforce – which is not very ethical and probably will also not function.

I therefore doubt that the unconditional refusal of a certain parallelism of societies is the best strategy to cope with diversity. In reality many of us today live anyway partially (sometimes completely) in "parallel sub societies", be it for a migration background or for personal preferences of a mixed lifestyle and a chosen complex personality identity. In some respect the toleration of parallel spaces might be more democratic than the integration model, because it legitimizes us individually to choose between remaining in our culture however we define it, or to assimilate (another no-word of political correctness) and immerse into whatever culture and group we choose, or, on the other hand, allows us to choose whatever adventurous cultural combinations or "safe places" we are looking for. An example for a vision of how parallel societies could emerge from today's multiplicity is found in fiction. Nial Stevenson, a writer the milieu of the valley, draws us in his book "The Diamond Age" – by the way an interesting "Erziehungsroman", a novel of educational development which was published fist in 1995 and apparently drew inspiration from the liberal Westcoast culture of the time – into a world of all kind of great or tiny nations, kingdoms, units, based on race, religion, political movements, ideologies, and other commonalities. The larger and wealthier ones reside in historical boundaries, in "leased territories" and other territorial units, the smaller ones occupy "claves", enclaves in or outside larger cities. In the novel a constable arresting a criminal is using the following formula: "Are you a member of any signatory tribe, phyle, registered diaspora, franchise-organized quasi national entity, sovereign polity, or any other form of dynamic security collective claiming status under the CEP – Common Economic Protocol?" (Stephenson, 1995, part one). Future will probably not look like Stevenson's vision, but it will also certainly not be like today. However since education is innately and inseparably committed to shape the future – of individuals and through them of societies – it is a quite responsible undertaking. I am afraid education research and praxis is too obsessed with weighting and assessing in the first line "competencies" rather than be concerned of innovative critical thinking and phantasy.

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