

Multiculturalism: A Panacea to Displacement and Migration

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the concept of multiculturalism, the history and factors that led to its growth in contemporary situation. Multiplicity of cultures coexisted in rural areas as well as in cities since antiquity, and there was no need for multiculturalism, but it is different today because the society we live in is not promoting any superior culture as it was in the past. Migration is on the increase for so many reasons; economic, sociological and political, and the implication is diversity which must be properly managed otherwise, it will lead to hostility and insecurity. This study explains the need to have relevant programs that is responding to present realities of multiculturalism because the Western societies do not have those former powers of integration and assimilation in that the migrants have the resources to keep their cultures as they can be in touch with their homes. Multiculturalism recognizes the right to be different, to hold different religious beliefs, sexual identifications and preferences, plural identifications and multiple citizenship without being discriminated or excluded and finally, give relevance to 'culture', 'cultural groups' and 'cultural rights'.

Key words: Culture, Diversity, Migration, Political, Economic, Cultural similarities

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1. INTRODUCTION

Delving into the concept of multiculturalism, the history and factors that led to its growth in contemporary situation is important because multiplicity of cultures coexisted in rural areas as well as in cities since antiquity, and there was no need for multiculturalism. However, it is worthy of note to explain that contemporary multicultural situations differ significantly from their antecedents because of the process of globalization, which speeded up in the second half of the 20th century by the new technologies of rapid transportation and telecommunication. Clavel (1995) argued that the increased mobility linked with air travel, people in remote areas are discovering new styles of life through their contacts with tourists, international migrations developed and a growing number of foreign groups settle in the great cities of the developed or developing countries. Also, the new facilities of telecommunication made it easy for migrants to maintain contacts with their home countries, which gives their cultures more chance to survive; therefore, giving rise to a new type of multiculturalism ideology.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Understanding the concept of multiculturalism in today's world is important as it will help to deconstruct some of the fallacies that has plagued the ideology making it impossible if not difficult to benefit from it as it is needed in today's global communities. The problem this article is focusing today is the challenge of misconception of what constitutes multiculturalism leading to poor development of relevant programs hindering proper application of them in resolving the conflicts arising from diversity due to forced displacement and voluntary migration.

1.2 Significance of the Study

It is important to know that migration from the South countries to the rich ones of the North is basically an economic trip as many individuals see this travel as the only way to escape local poverty and instability and to materialize their horizons of expectation, not necessarily because Western civilization appears a superior one to them. They are no longer travelling to learn western civilization as they can learn them from their own countries with the help of technology, but they move because they wish to get jobs, earn higher salaries and enjoy better social security systems.

Therefore, it is important to know by the host communities especially, that even though, a process of assimilation and integration develops, as in the past, it does not lead, however, to the easy fusion of the migrants in the host countries, as they stick to their cultures because they wish to preserve their identities, especially with the help of more rapid and cheaper transport, and new telecommunication technologies. So, this study is important as it is very informative and helpful in developing relevant programs that is responding to present realities. It is no longer business as usual for the current arrangement deprives the Western societies good part of their former power of integration and assimilation in that the migrants can keep in touch with their homes.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as stated below

1. Determine the concept of multiculturalism
2. Explain factors promoting multiculturalism
3. Describe the challenges of multiculturalism
4. Describe the benefits of multiculturalism
5. Proffer solution to the challenges obstructing the growth of multiculturalism as a tool for peaceful coexistence

The Study Outline

The study was divided into seven divisions (A-H) starting with an **Introduction** that contained the background to the study, followed by the Statement of the Problem which is focusing on the challenge of misconception of what constitutes multiculturalism leading to poor development of relevant programs hindering proper application of them in resolving the conflicts arising from diversity due to forced displacement and voluntary migration. The Significance of the Study was discussed, the Objectives of the Study were itemized. The remaining sections of the paper are as follows:

Section 2: Conceptualizing Multiculturalism which deals with the explanation of the ideology

Section 3. Factors Promoting Multiculturalism Dialogue

Section 4: The Challenges of Multiculturalism

Section 5. The Benefits of Multiculturalism

Section 6: Conclusion

Section 7: Recommendation

2. CONCEPTUALIZING MULTICULTURALISM

Berkes (2010) argued that because of international migration, multiculturalism has become the dominant theory in the last 20-30 years in some countries of Western civilization. Multiculturalism takes into account diversity and cultural differences, and defines itself as an alternative to assimilation. Therefore, multiculturalism is the appreciation, acceptance or promotion of multiple ethnic cultures, applied to the demographic make-up of a specific place, usually at the organizational level, e.g. schools, businesses, neighborhoods, cities or nations. Advocates argue that equitable status should be extended to all ethnic and religious groups without promoting any specific ethnic, religious, and cultural community values above any. According to them, it promotes a fairer system that allows people to truly express who they are within a society. Multiculturalism is more tolerant and adapts better to social issues because culture is not one definable thing based on one race or religion, but rather the result of multiple factors that change as the world changes.

Kymlicka (1995) described multiculturalism as a body of thought in political philosophy about the proper way to respond to cultural and religious diversity. He argued that mere toleration of group differences is said to fall short of treating members of minority groups as equal citizens; recognition and positive accommodation of group differences are required through “group-differentiated rights,” a term coined by Williams (1998). Some group-differentiated rights are held by individual members of minority groups, as in the case of individuals who are granted exemptions from generally applicable laws in virtue of their religious beliefs or individuals who seek language accommodations in schools or in voting. Multiculturalism in today’s world means the political accommodation by the state and/or a dominant group of all minority cultures defined first and foremost by reference to race or ethnicity; and more controversially, by reference to nationality, aboriginality, or religion, the latter being groups that tend to make larger claims and so tend to resist having their claims reduced to those of immigrants. It is strongly associated with ethnic assertiveness and has been part of a wider current of ‘identity’ politics which has transformed the idea of equality as sameness to equality as difference.

The prominence of multiculturalism in political theory is due to disciplinary dynamic as noticed in Rawls's (1971) focus on justice in a context of value pluralism which has led the next generation of political theorists to define their questions more in terms of the nature of community and minority rights than in terms of distributive justice. More importantly, multiculturalism has been used as an umbrella term to characterize the moral and political claims of a wide range of disadvantaged groups, around the world. These groups are not only culture based in terms of ethnicity, like African Americans, but include groups like women, gays and lesbians, and even the disabled because it is a polysemous word.

The advocates of multiculturalism have advanced many reasons to show support for the promotion of it. According to Colombo (2014), multiculturalism promotes more democratic inclusion, assuring real equal access and participation for all members of society without subordinating inclusion or assimilation into the majority group. Another reason why multiculturalism is advocated for is that it helps to overcome previous offensive and undemocratic relations of domination and exclusion, recognizing the violence and exploitation by the members of the dominant group who impose their own rules and ideas by presenting them as ‘natural’ and ‘universal’. Also, multiculturalism will make it possible for all people to take part in the debate on the ‘rules of the game’ for participation and to have a say in how to build a fairer, more equal society and assure adequate recognition and respect for cultural difference, fighting stereotypes and prejudices that depict minority groups in negative ways and entrap minority group members in despised identities.

Multiculturalism recognizes the right to be different, to hold different religious beliefs, sexual identifications and preferences, plural identifications and multiple citizenship without being discriminated or excluded and finally, give relevance to ‘culture’, ‘cultural groups’ and ‘cultural rights’ (Levy, 2000).

2.1 Critique of Multiculturalism

Just like every idea has pros and cons, multiculturalism is not exempted. Sometime in the late 90s, there were widespread talk of a necessary retreat from multiculturalism, as it is considered a failure and fostering social fragmentation, parallel lives and terrorist groups. The backlash became stronger due to a sequence of tragic events like series of urban riots (Oldham, UK, in 2001, Paris *banlieues*, France, and Cronulla Beach, Australia, in 2005) described as fights between immigrants or children of immigrants and local youth. According to press and in political discourses, the riots were presented as being caused by the inability or unwillingness of immigrants to integrate, encouraged as they were to live parallel lives by generous multicultural policies that pushed them to feel apart from the rest of the population. Other reasons that pushed for backlash against multiculturalism were the murder of Theo van Gogh, the filmmaker in 2004 in the Netherlands, the 7/7 2005 terrorist bombing in London and harsh discussions in most western countries on the necessity to counter (Islamic) religious fundamentalism, issuing laws to ban the wearing of Islamic headscarves in public spaces or the building of mosques. These series of tragic events pushed for a retreat from multiculturalism as a normative ideal for policies in all western countries.

3. PROMOTING MULTICULTURALISM DIALOGUE

Even though multiculturalism has received severe hurtful criticisms, it is still important to know that our society is 'multiculturalized' and the painful reality is that it is here with its attendant problems which we have to learn to deal with. However, it is also important to know that there are some benefits of multiculturalism which further make it imperative for us to continue to seek ways to make it work. In recent times, countries' economies have witnessed encroachment and cultural expressions at unprecedented levels giving rise to new challenges and opportunities. Technology and science have shrunk communication and abolished distance as travels have never been so rapid and convenient, to the benefits of some and the exclusion of others. Promoting multicultural dialogue requires preconditions that include consideration of culture dynamics, which has to do with the ways in which cultures relate to or interact with one another, have awareness of cultural commonalities and shared goals, and the identification of the challenges of reconciling cultural differences and identities. (UNESCO Report 2009)

Cultural expressions take various forms - oral traditions, social practices, performing arts and traditional knowledge and crafts, transmitted through generations, constantly recreated and providing communities with a sense of identity and continuity. Cultural interactions take three main modes – 1. cultural borrowings, 2. cultural exchanges and 3. Cultural impositions. Cultural *borrowing* occurs when the cultural practice of one population is assimilated by another in because of its perceived advantages over the one it has previously employed. People may abandon ancient customs when they find the new practice useful and helpful to their survival.

Cultural *exchanges* happen when different cultures come together to make collective human achievements and developments that are beneficial to all without one particular culture claiming ownership. Instead, neighbouring and mutually dependent cultures allow significant cultural transfers to take place across large geographical areas which benefits the cultural development of the populations concerned. This is where populations take care of their cultural differences without a grudge and promote peaceful relations. Finally, cultural *imposition* through war and conquest is another form of cultural interaction down through the ages and this has happened in many parts of the world. Recently, colonization of African countries by Western powers has led the imposition of Western culture on African cultures with little or no regard for the value and meaning of the cultures of Africans. Although independence and general developments has led to fairer valuations of African cultures. In an effort to promote multicultural dialogue, knowledge of the forms of cultural interaction is important as it guides in the facilitation of intercultural dialogue, even if the process of interaction is via imposition or oppression. The knowledge and discussion of past grievances can help, at least to ensure that the focus of such dialogue does not remain negative and critical examination of different cultural frames of reference are engaged. (UNESCO Report 2009).

Awareness of cultural commonalities and shared goals is an important aspect of promoting multiculturalism and its dialogue. Many people tend to be concerned about the visible differences noticed on the surface, but do not see the commonalities or similarities and shared goals that should be explored to promote unity and strength in diversity and benefit from it. According to Bryant (2019:1)

Trying to discover common ground and to use these as a basis for a working relationship can often be a more positive approach in a cross-cultural environment.

Even though on the surface, it might look like the cultures are different, there are many areas of commonalities as better captured in the Articles of Human Rights. All the countries of the world uphold the principles of human rights and it is in consensus with their value systems even culturally, so there are many areas of similarities. For example, every culture believes in the sanctity of human life and a life of dignity including the aspect of responsibility that goes with the rights.

To encourage multiculturalism, it is important to identify areas of similarities as promoted by the Human Rights Articles and emphasize them as these values are also captured in the western cultures and values. There is no culture that does not uphold principles of love, respect, safety and quality life. So, there are areas of commonalities that promote multiculturalism.

4. THE CHALLENGES OF MULTICULTURALISM

Just like every coin has two sides, every idea or situation has benefits and challenges and multiculturalism is not an exception. Scholars and practitioners have identified some situations that make the promotion of multiculturalism very difficult. One of the factors that makes the promotion of multiculturalism difficult is the general lack of appreciation for culture. Many people just live their lives without any conscious awareness of their cultures because they simply live their lives the way they found their parents living, and the way they see their peers living. People lack conscious awareness and appreciation of culture because of the lack of education, and not college education, because many of us have it, but social human relations education. So, any attempt at promoting multiculturalism meets a brick wall.

Another factor that makes it hard to promote multiculturalism in our society is the existence of various forms of superiority and inferiority complexes leading to a feeling of superior culture over others. Many people tend to have an understanding that their culture is more sophisticated either because of their economic status which is not correct. The economic value of a person does not translate into cultural values, but unfortunately, many people are trapped in this cage and it makes it difficult, if not impossible for them to embrace multiculturalism. (Lutz, 2017). Lack of political goodwill on the part of the government is the third factor that makes it hard to promote multiculturalism as monoculturalism is the preferred philosophy as it makes governance easy. Control is easier in monolithic environment and this is what government exists to do, control the people. Naturally, governments are bound to put in place obstacles to the achievement of genuine multiculturalism, even though they are pretending to be in support of the same.

The possible reduction of a former dominant culture because of the introduction of multiculturalism also make people hate multiculturalism as they not want to lose their culture's prominent status. Yes, racial discrimination is decreased with the introduction of multiculturalism, but it is at the detriment of culture of the host community. Even to a large extent, a culture might also be dependent on another culture for the formation of their tradition and society as new ways of thinking and thought processes could also have a great influence on different cultures, altering their traditional beliefs and this might be unacceptable to some people.

5. THE BENEFITS OF MULTICULTURALISM

Migration has led to multiculturalism and this has led to other challenges and opportunities but the rise in populism tend to make diversity a problem. However, there are many benefits of multiculturalism which this section of this paper addresses. One of the benefits of diversity is the improvement on the quality of government policies. Many countries' governments around the world have started responding to the increasing ethnic diversity in a number of ways over the years by rectifying a number of international conventions based on elimination of discrimination and the assurance of fundamental human rights for all citizens including minority groups. (Singham 2006) For example, New Zealand since introduced domestic legislations and other policy frameworks to ensure equality of treatment of all. The beauty of this policy change is that 'a strategic approach to diversity is vital for the future' (Singham 2006) because it will lead to permanent peace which is a requirement for sustainable growth and development.

Another benefit of multiculturalism is the strength noticed in diversity because of the rich resources offered by diverse communities. It recognizes and values the contributions made by these communities. The benefits of diversity encompass the equality paradigm because a nation cannot reap the fruits of diversity effectively without ensuring all citizens are treated equally.

The strategic economic importance of immigrants (skilled workers) can never be over emphasized as they are there to fill up the job opening as the aging population is of no work force. These have been realized by the western world and the unending quest by immigrants for greener pastures, therefore, making them have a meeting point so it makes sense to promote ethnic community integration as a global talent management opportunity for all. So, multiculturalism has an economic benefit for both the immigrant in search of greener pasture and the host country needing work force to grow their economy.

Still on economy, studies have shown that the most innovative and productive workplaces are culturally and ethnically diverse as managing workplace risks are better done when multiple perspectives on any issue are sought. This is possible because diversified workforce has cutting edge potential, and are enormously helpful in tapping into different worldviews and new markets within the domestic population base. Although, it is important to know that diversified management strategies are needed for this plan to be successful. The workplace must explore diverse cultural values and beliefs and linguistic skills in the workplace.

Multiculturalism creates a sense of vibrancy and reduces racial discrimination within our communities. In the social arena, cultural diversity enriches our everyday interactions and experiences as people from other cultures could share information regarding their own cultures, which helps in understanding the rationale behind certain traditions and practices regardless of their obscenity or offending nature. New sights, sounds and tastes are created making for a more interesting environment evident in the many multicultural marketplaces, celebrations and festivals. Multiculturalism brings the world closer home and we can tap into the potential this offers everyone and for us all to benefit from it, we must consider the strength that is in diversity as a new way of approaching the issue of ethnic diversity.

6. CONCLUSION

Even though communities have the right to live within their own cultural backgrounds and experiences, but for the issues of voluntary migration and displacement, assisted by technology in terms of transport and communication, it is not possible for any society to live by itself. Therefore, the inevitable result of these factors is multiculturalism and a multicultural society.

Multiculturalism is a philosophy that promotes peaceful coexistence of community members with different cultural backgrounds to come together for various reasons and live within the framework of common values. Initially, it was viewed as societal scheme in which cultural diversity and richness are reflected, but it has gone beyond that to become a socio-economic strategy which has received political support as legislations and developments plans are now official and aimed to promote it because proper implementation of the programme will go a long way to be of benefit to both the host community and the immigrants. So, because multiculturalism is an important tool for economic development, social cohesion, and political stability, it is an instrument that can help manage the challenges of migration and displacement.

7. POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Multiculturalism has been viewed as a political order in many countries today in order to keep societies together, the challenges are still present and efforts should be made to embark on a massive media campaign and explore other avenues to reach out to people to get familiar with the concept as it is of great benefit to all concerned. The biggest challenge facing multiculturalism is poor understanding of the concept. Culture education is very paramount to every member of the society because understanding that there is no superior culture is important. Culture awareness is a prerequisite for peaceful co-existence. There is hardly any community in the world that is monoculture, so when people know that to be different is not been bad, it goes a long way to promote peace and development. Education on the area of attitude to address the issues of complexes as some people have superiority or inferiority complexes and these pose huge problems and it can be taken care of via social education. So, the teacher education can be very helpful as teachers have a huge role to play in the change of mindset of the people.

The last and most important recommendation this study is making is the need for political will of the government. If the government policies are in reflection of the societal needs, it will definitely address issues of multiculturalism in its policies and programs. So, government need to braise up and develop political will to address challenges of multiculturalism in their countries by making pronouncements that respect multiculturalism.

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