Unity in Diversity: The New Multicultural Reality

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Abstract
Culture is often defined as the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of human groups. It is the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes a group of like individuals. That is why every society tries to protect itself against alien cultures, though they often criticize and modify their systems and ways of life according to the improvement of means and ends to be reached.

Multicultural societies have people (s) with different backgrounds living in them. Since the 1960s most of the Western countries (Europe) have experienced sweeping changes in their social structures. People from ex-colonial countries migrated into those societies (legally & illegally) with their own ways of doing things. In the United States of America multiculturalism was associated with the Civil Revolution as a result of the huge population movement (migration) into the Western (California) and Southern States (Florida) from Cuba and Latin America. Families comprising three generations (grand father, father, and children) moved into the American society with different language, customs, and ways of doing things. The situation created a huge burden on the American society at the local and federal levels.

The education system at all levels (primary & higher) incorporated many consequences with implications for men & women, family characteristics, value
orientation, acculturation, economic factors, and psychological factors.

Public schools in such societies must take decisions toward restructuring the school system to provide equal opportunities regarding course content, assessment, staff recruitment, and language of instruction (refer to the changes in Legislation in Florida to adapt to the situation). In Sudan, which is a multicultural country in itself, different models were adopted by the Central Government (since 1940s up to 1972) to educate the non-Arabic, non-English speaking children of the southern part of the country. Six common languages (Colloquial) were chosen and written in English letters. Children were taught by one of those languages for two years. Then English and Arabic were added as a second (foreign) language for two more years. At the fourth grade, the local language is dropped and children continue their studies either in English or Arabic.

The education system has a major role to play in adapting the whole society to the multicultural reality. At the lower levels students must be provided with equal opportunity, recognizing their cultural background, bearing in mind the worldwide population movement of today.

The role of the university is essential and more crucial, as it expected to help in many ways:

FIRST: by restructuring its orientation & academic programmes, recruiting policies (allowing multicultural recruitment among staff & administrators), and modifying its regulations in general to suit the situation.
SECOND: by continuously emphasizing that “unity is in diversity”; that is to say that human societies are kept unified and strong as long as their cultural differences are recognized.
THIRD: by emphasizing that multiculturalism is a normal and positive issue rather than being disintegrative and equal to "racism". Cultural transfer is important for human societies, and, historically human societies were formed by people from different backgrounds migrating into more comfortable agricultural and industrial spots.
FOURTH: by emphasising that all nations are interdependent in terms of history, trade, communications, and current economic and social problems
such as unemployment, drugs, and crime. The ever widening gap between rich and poor nations must be decreased and the political regimes of the developing world must be encouraged to develop toward democracy and care about human rights in order to enable people to stay and live in their societies.

FIFTH: The shape and direction of developing societies need to be restructured through investment in different sectors of the economy, education being most important. The International Aid must play considerable role in decreasing the economic gap (especially after what the world has witnessed of the socio-economic crisis of the 1970s & the monitory crisis of the 1980s). International Aid must be used to finance economically & socially beneficial projects which could not be financed by national governments, and not pumped into wasteful projects by the recipients (such as military equipments and administrative expenses).

Introduction

Culture is often defined as the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of human groups. Culture includes all the customs and attitudes, as well as the artifacts evolved by human groups during their living in a common area for a period of time. As human beings are active, they continuously revise, criticize, and modify their systems and ways of life according to the improvements of ends to be reached and the most suitable means of attain those ends. "Borrowing from other nations" (either through research or direct contacts among societies or both) form the best way of the enrichment and improvement of human culture. Because culture characterizes a group of like individuals, every human society often tries to protect itself against alien cultures, though they often criticize and modify their systems and ways of life.

Multicultural societies have people(s) with different backgrounds living in them. Since the 1960s, few years after most of the Third World countries have attained their political independence, most of the Western Countries (Europe and the United States of America) have experienced sweeping changes in their social structures. People from ex-colonial countries migrated into those societies (legally & illegally) with their own ways of doing things. Multiculturalism was, in a way or another, behind most of
the historic events. Nations often fought across their boundaries because of conflicts upon social recognition. To those nations, social recognition meant racial, religious, and cultural rights. People are safe within their societies as long as they live with each other in peace.

When this author argues that "unity is in diversity", he wants to emphasize that culture borrowing is not a disadvantage in itself. Borrowed techniques, traditions and other cultural traits are useful, particularly from more advanced countries. Some would argue that culture transfer is harmful to what they call "conservative" societies. In the world of today innovations are adopted and applied everywhere. Nothing is culture-free. Hundred thousands of people of different cultures and different tongues (languages) from different nationalities (cultures) are taking-off world airports, arriving at others, in few hours (look at the people attending this conference).

Culture Transfer:

It was cited in history books that Plato, the famous Greek philosopher, developed his philosophical doctrines and extracted his educational theory and "incorporated into his city-state all that was thought best from Sparta" (Sharif: 1990,98). So did Erasmus (1466 – 1536) when he attempted to develop a common culture from visiting societies other than his own. In the United States of America multiculturalism was associated with the Civil Revolution as a result of the huge population movement (migration) into the Western and Southern States from Cuba, China, and Latin America. Families comprising three generations (grand father, father, and children) moved into the American society with different languages, customs, and ways of doing things. The situation created a huge burden on the American society at the local and federal levels. The background to those problems incorporating the gender aspect, religious norms, with all its implications for men and women such as family characteristics, value orientation, acculturation, as well as psychological and economic factors.

The New Multicultural Reality:

After a long struggle in the American society, emphasizing the concept of "Melting Pot", multiculturalism came into wide public use during the early 1980s in the context
of public school curriculum reform", as argued by Professor Gregory Jay of the University of Wisconsin (Jay: 2002, 1). This traditional concept of blending diverse people into a single American culture was seriously challenged giving way to diversity judged by "citizenship". This new trend considered the traditional concept as a cover for "oppressive assimilation", as argued by Jay. The advocates of the new trend wanted to preserve distinctly different ethics, racial or cultural communities without melting them into a common dominant culture.

In answering the question: does immigrants absorption into the American society still work?, Grenier and Stepick (1992) argued that when the number of new comers into the American society was considered, it seemed that the American future depended on absorption. However, they also argued that absorption does not mean assimilation as it was back in the 1950s. In this regard, they stated, "...It needs not be incompatible with ethnic identity"..." and we as a nation need to find new ways to talk about and encourage becoming Americans". Here is a quotation:

:One in nine Americans is an immigrant. Nearly one-fifth of the U.S residents speak a language other than English at home "...". The number of foreign-born Americans is 33 million and growing ...today’s Americans can and will become good Americans and enrich the national life if the concept of boiling pot is reinvented, not upon the old idea of creating one assimilating society, but on citizenship basis".

The State of Florida was described by Grenier and Stepick as "the multicultural crest of the wave of the American future, counted as the wellspring of both bilingualism and multi-bilingualism".

One important aspect of multiculturalism is language, being the media for communication and understanding. The simple nearest understanding for bilingualism is that an individual or a group of people use(s) two languages, one is original (mother tongue) and the other is acquired either at school or through contacts and living with others who speak that language. The capability of the individual of using both languages may not be equal, but she/he is often able to communicate well through both.
Bilingualism occurs due to many factors, the most important being colonization and migration. In the continents of Africa, South America, and Asia the colonial powers have created such societies by gathering ethnic groups from different neighboring tribal areas and drawing lines (political boundaries) to secure their interests. This situation was clear in almost all African countries South of the Sahara. The language of the colonial powers (French & English) were enforced as the formal language of the country. (this situation was further completed because of the unwritten vernacular languages of those countries).

The migration of masses of people, whether compulsory (due to war, natural disasters, economic or political reasons) or voluntarily, causes bilingualism as the immigrants learn the language of the new societies (or the recipient society adopts the language of the immigrants as it was the case when the people of Uruguay adopted Spanish. The most recent was the migration from Morocco and Algiers to France, Italy and other countries of Western Europe with all its consequences.

The geographic location of a country plays a major role in multiculturalism
The Republic of the Sudan, for instance, is surrounded by nine African and one Asian countries. It shares boarders with Egypt, Libya, Chad, Central African Republic, Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Saudi Arabia across the Red Sea (its northwestern and western boundaries with Libya, Chad and Central Africa alone is 2525 kms. long). Due to this unique location, the people of Sudan speak about 132 vernacular languages although they can speak, write and fairly communicate through Arabic Language.

The Role of Universities:
Schools and like institutions of learning are effective means through which cultural coherence is often maintained. Structural and attitudinal changes within any given society occurs due to development in the educational process. Development leads, in turn, to positive changes in the existing systems.
Educational transfer was, and still is, an inevitable phenomenon. Historically nearly all nations of the world came into contact with each other. Today, the world is dominated by modern technology, which plays a major role in the universal transmission of knowledge, mainly from the big metropolitan areas to the periphery, as argued by Altbach (1982). It is this author's belief that cultural borrowing is not a disadvantage. What we grasp from other cultures help strengthen links among nations.

Public schools in multicultural societies must take decisions toward restructuring the school system to provide equal opportunities regarding course content, assessment, staff recruitment, and language of instruction (see the changes in the Legislation in the State of Florida to adapt to the situation). In Sudan, which is a multicultural country in itself, different models were adopted by the Central Government (from 1940s up to 1972) to educate the non-Arabic, non-English speaking children of the southern part of the country.

The foundation of the present education in the southern part of the country was laid by the British early 1920s. The multilingual nature of the region made it difficult to use a single language for education. Out of about fifty (50) languages, six common (about 60% similar to the rest of languages) were chosen by the British authorities (in Rejjaf Language Conference 1928) to be developed and used in educating children. The six vernaculars were used for instruction in the FIRST TWO years of education. ENGLISH Language was taught as a subject, then as the media for instruction from the THIRD year onward. Later, during the 1940s, Arabic Language, the formal language of the country, was introduced to match the situation with the rest of the regions. Hence, two patterns of education were running side by side up to 1966: (a) the local system where vernaculars were used as medium of instruction with English and Arabic as subjects (foreign languages), English taking over from the third year to the end, and (b) the national system in which Arabic was used as medium of instruction from the first year with English as a subject (foreign language) from the fifth year. Although it was very hard for young children to learn two, and in some cases three, alien languages the national system was constantly on the increase up to the year 1966 when the local system came to an end.
The role of the university is more essential, as it expected to help in many ways:

**First; By restructuring its orientation & academic programmes:** All universities have designed orientation programmes for new student (freshmen). Most of these programmes emphasize the academic side of the campus life, including bylaws and university regulations. Statistics concerning the total number of university students, their nationalities, and gendre are often given. However, more details must be incorporated into these programmes concerning respect and appreciation for different cultures, human rights, brotherhood and the like. The university regulations need to be revised and developed to suit the multicultural reality at the world's institutions of higher education.

**Second; the recruitment policies** at the world universities also need a lot of revision and change in order to hire more multicultural staff at the academic and administrative posts. Human societies are kept unified and strong as long as their cultural differences are recognized.

**Third; By emphasizing that multiculturalism is a normal** and positive issue rather than being disintegrative and equal to "racism". Cultural transfer is important for human societies, and, historically human societies were formed by people from different backgrounds migrating into more comfortable agricultural and industrial spots.

**Fourth; By emphasizing that all nations are interdependent** in terms of history, trade, communications, and current economic and social problems such as unemployment, drugs, and crime. The ever widening gap between rich and poor nations must be decreased and the political regimes of the developing world must be encouraged to develop toward democracy and care about human rights in order to enable people to stay and live in their societies.
Fifth; the shape and direction of developing societies need to be restructured through investment in different sectors of the economy, education being most important. The International Aid must play considerable role in decreasing the economic gap (especially after what the world has witnessed of the socio-economic crisis of the 1970s & the monetary crisis of the 1980s). International Aid must be used to finance economically & socially beneficial projects which could not be financed by national governments and not pumped into wasteful projects by the recipients (such as military equipments and administrative expenses).
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- [http://www.uwm.edu/Multicult/Multiculturalism.html](http://www.uwm.edu/Multicult/Multiculturalism.html)
