

A NEW CHALLENGE: MULTICULTURALISM GOING GLOBAL

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Abstract: Multiculturalism has been used as an umbrella term to characterize the moral and political claims of a wide range of marginalized groups, including African Americans, women, LGBT people, and people with disabilities. This is true of the debates in the 1980s over whether and how to diversify school curricula to recognize the achievements of historically marginalized groups. Multiculturalism does work but it takes time, people are naturally resistant to change and are suspicious of something that's different. People born now into multicultural societies are much more likely to believe multiculturalism is normal and to accept it.

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In order to understand the term Multiculturalism, there are other concepts to be defined, such as Culture, Cultural Studies, Culturalism. According to The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies, the word Culture is a highly complicated word, with a large number of definitions. Going back to the roots of this concept, Raymond Williams has suggested that the word culture began as a noun of process connected to growing crops, that is, cultivation (Barker, 44). Therefore, the concept of Culture relates to one of the best known occupations of people, farming or growing crops, field cultivation. Peasants, or the so-called farmers nowadays, have identified themselves with agriculture and animals. Furthermore, they had no reason to detach from the actual job of cultivating different vegetables, grains and so forth. Their main purpose was to cultivate cereal crops and to use them as food.

Raymond Williams was also thinking of Culture as a whole and distinctive way of life (Barker, 44). For him, Culture was made of a sum of constant activities of ordinary people, so each individual's practices, pieces of daily work mattered in the end. Furthermore, during modern times, other meanings were attached to the concept of Culture. Nowadays Culture involves social meanings, which are generated by many daily interactions in a variety of ways. The meanings of a Culture depend upon people's ideas and significations of the world they live in. The way they comprehend culture is the way to explore how meaning is produced symbolically in terms of forms of representation. These forms or practices of human representation take place within the social framework in which individuals can produce, interact with others, make products widely spread around.

In terms of Cultural Studies, the Sage Dictionary clearly states the fact that The domain of cultural studies can be understood as an interdisciplinary or post-disciplinary field of inquiry that explores the production and inculcation of culture or maps of meaning (Barker, 44). In other words, the main purpose of Cultural Studies is to study the concept of Culture itself, with all its varieties of practices of representation set. In an era of soft boundaries, Culture goes global and can easily become the focus of this field of inquiry or investigation, called Cultural Studies.

The history of Cultural Studies goes back to the 1960s, when it rapidly increased due to the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Chris Barker writes about Cultural Studies as a discursive formation. This term may also refer to the particular discourse governed by this principle, in which many different examples have the same perspectives, patterns of concerns, or concepts. Some good example can be the discourses of medicine or economics.

A discursive formation could be considered a group of images, ideas and practices, which individuals can talk about. The author accurately observes:

[...] cultural studies is constituted by a regulated way of speaking about objects (which cultural studies brings into view) and coheres around key concepts, ideas and concerns that include articulation, culture, discourse, ideology, identity, popular culture, power, representation and text (42).

Nowadays, Cultural Studies focuses upon how the world is socially constructed. But it also triggers themes as identity or difference. Eventually, Multiculturalism is a sum of differences. So, the main focus of Cultural Studies is the exploration of culture itself, as constituted by the meanings and representations generated by human signifying practices, and the context in which they occur (Barker, 43). Nevertheless, these cultural practices have, in their inner core, a great number of relations of power and the political consequences, that tend to be carefully and thoroughly analyzed.

Another important noun useful in the Multiculturalism contexts is Culturalism, that is a well-defined concept in the Sage Dictionary:

Theoretically, culturalism is associated with the adoption of a broadly anthropological definition of culture that takes it to be an everyday lived process not confined to 'high art' (43).

In this case, Culturalism focuses on the commonness of culture, meaning that people's practices share common attributes. So, it emphasizes on lived experience, globally shared by individuals, in order to explore the way that active human beings create cultural meanings (Barker, 43). For Raymond Williams the term Culturalism is a form of cultural materialism that carries out an inquiry on culture, in order to discover its material conditions of production and reception (Idem, 43). It is considered a global concept that attracts all sorts of human productions in terms of culture.

On the other hand, Multiculturalism enhances the idea of a multicultural society, a society that tries to promote ethnic/racial equality. All in all, Multiculturalism is diversity and respects the idea of difference worldwide. Chris Barker states that this concept neglects the status of power itself and its huge dimension. As an example, the author argues that the day-to-day experiences of racism in relation to housing, employment and physical violence may slip from view (Barker, 127).

There are some critics of Multiculturalism that tend to overshadow the importance of the concept, stating that people would be better served by an anti-racist approach (Idem, 127). True, but this is also the approach enhanced by Multiculturalism itself. No one can be fully committed to a modern and a multicultural society without having anti-racist approach in mind. So, paying attention to diversity in faith, in beliefs, in thoughts, multiculturalists emphasize the differences not only of language, custom, and lifestyle but, more fundamentally, of basic values and worldviews.

Besides the useful concepts connected to multiculturalism, well defined and explained in the Sage Dictionary, this research project aims to discuss and analyze other elements related to this huge phenomenon, called Multiculturalism. The present research will be focused on theories of multiculturalism. Contemporary theories of multiculturalism, which originated in the late 1980s and early 1990s, tend to focus their arguments on immigrants who are ethnic and religious minorities (e.g. Latinos in the U.S., Muslims in Western Europe), minority nations (e.g. Catalans, Basque, Welsh, Québécois), and indigenous peoples (e.g. Native peoples in North America, Australia, and New Zealand).

The two primary theories or models of multiculturalism are best defined by the metaphors commonly used to describe them the "melting pot" and the "salad bowl" theories. The melting pot theory of multiculturalism assumes that various immigrant groups will tend to "melt together" abandoning their individual cultures and eventually becoming fully

assimilated into the predominant society. It is typically used to describe the assimilation of immigrants into the United States. In 1782, French-American immigrant J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur wrote that in America, individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world.

The melting pot model has been criticized for reducing diversity, causing people to lose their traditions, and for having to be enforced through governmental policy. For example, the U.S. Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 forced the assimilation of nearly 350,000 Indians into American society without any regard for the diversity of Native American heritage and lifestyles (De La Torre, 2009).

A more liberal theory of multiculturalism, the salad bowl theory describes a heterogeneous society in which people coexist but retain at least some of the unique characteristics of their traditional culture. Like a salad's ingredients, different cultures are brought together, but retain their own distinct flavors. In the United States, New York City, with its many unique ethnic communities like "Little India," "Little Odessa," and "Chinatown" is considered an example of a salad bowl society.

The salad bowl theory asserts that it is not necessary for people to give up their cultural heritage in order to be considered members of the dominant society. For example, African Americans do not need to stop observing Kwanzaa rather than Christmas in order to be considered "Americans." On the negative side, the cultural differences encouraged by the salad bowl model can divide a society resulting in prejudice and discrimination. In addition, critics point to a 2007 study conducted by American political scientist Robert Putnam showing that people living in salad bowl multicultural communities were less likely to vote or volunteer for community improvement projects.

Multicultural societies are characterized by people of different races, ethnicities, and nationalities living together in the same community. In multicultural communities, people retain, pass down, celebrate, and share their unique cultural ways of life, languages, art, traditions, and behaviors (Jonas, 2007).

The characteristics of multiculturalism often spread into the community's public schools, where curricula are crafted to introduce young people to the qualities and benefits of cultural diversity. Though sometimes criticized as a form of "political correctness," educational systems in multicultural societies stress the histories and traditions of minorities in classrooms and textbooks. A 2018 study conducted by the Pew Research Center found that the "post-millennial" generation of people ages 6 to 21 are the most diverse generation in American society (Fry & Parker, 2018).

Far from an exclusively American phenomenon, examples of multiculturalism are found worldwide. In Argentina, for example, newspaper articles, and radio and television programs are commonly presented in English, German, Italian, French, or Portuguese, as well as the country's native Spanish. Indeed, Argentina's constitution promotes immigration by recognizing the right of individuals to retain multiple citizenships from other countries.

Multiculturalism is the key to achieving a high degree of cultural diversity. Diversity occurs when people of different races, nationalities, religions, ethnicities, and philosophies come together to form a community. A truly diverse society is one that recognizes and values the cultural differences in its people.

Proponents of cultural diversity argue that it makes humanity stronger and may, in fact, be vital to its long-term survival. In 2001, the General Conference of UNESCO took this position when it asserted in its Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity that ...cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature.

A very useful book for this research study is *Cultural Studies: Archaeologies, Genealogies, Discontents*, written by Professor Eduard Vlad. The first chapter, called Preliminaries, is very important, because it states the importance of terms like, Culture and

Cultural Studies. One of the definitions of Culture is a way of life (Vlad, 13), but also culture can be seen as a record of intellectual and artistic excellence (Ibid). Nowadays, culture changes rapidly. Our world needs to understand culture not only as reflected at individual level, culture is no longer to be seen only as an individual's endeavor to rise in the social world (Ibid), but also as a massive collective attempt to continuously improve ourselves in a forever changing world.

The author argues that science has progressed a lot lately, which is inevitable, this huge development having pros – making life easier for more and more people and cons – causing problems for humankind's survival (14). The concept of Cultural Studies is equally significant to the topic of Multiculturalism and it is seen by the author as a distinct field of investigation (15), quite frequently considered an object of study regarding culture. A number of theories of cultural studies have emerged from the desire to study the cultural phenomenon more closely.

The word culture seems difficult to be defined, Raymond Williams stating a connection between culture and agriculture (to cultivate the fields). But the verb has another meaning in the phrase – a highly cultivated man, meaning an intellectual of his time, who possesses the ability to think and understand things, especially complicated ideas.

Eduard Vlad also mentions in this chapter the four meanings of the word culture, as depicted by Raymond Williams. One meaning refers to an individual's habit of mind, but the other three indicates features of a group or a society – the state of intellectual development of a whole society; the arts; the whole way of life of people (18).

Two opposite attitudes have been identified so far: cultural elitism and cultural populism. The first one is a traditional approach in Culturalism, which investigates the high culture (22). The ones who accept this attitude enthusiastically think mainly about the extraordinary monuments from the past with high cultural value. One cultural elitist is considered Allan David Bloom (*The Closing of the American Mind*, 1987) and another one is Harold Bloom (*The Western Canon*). So, culture and civilization are associated with the educated, higher classes of society.

The result of multiculturalism must be a united community where groups with different cultures and traditions live together in harmony. Multiculturalism means that one cultural identity does not dominate all other identities; that people are able to participate in their faith community without denying or hiding their cultural identities. Significant integration is essential for community harmony.

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