

THE AIMS OF CULTURAL STUDIES IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

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Abstract: 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. 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.

Keywords: multiculturalism, cultural diversity, melting pot, racism, ethnicity

To be or not to be...Multicultural? This is the question. Whether we like it or not, we live in this world, where most of the modern societies are rather multicultural, instead of monocultural ones. Consequently, without stating multicultural reality as “good” or “bad”, nowadays society deals with the most important features of Multiculturalism, all over the world. But why this eternal, everlasting debate? Clear and simple. Because Multiculturalism, throughout its history, had its ups and downs, pros and cons, multiple facets that famous postmodernist critics of the matter were unable to decide upon.

The purpose of this brief academic essay is to search and find a lot of information about Multiculturalism and to link the results to Cultural Studies. I remember Tony Blair's words in a TV interview “I never know, although I use the term myself occasionally, quite what people mean when they talk about Multiculturalism” (Mason, 49). Well, in one word, Multiculturalism is Diversity. Paying attention to such diversity, multiculturalists emphasize the differences not only of language, custom, and lifestyle but, more fundamentally, of basic beliefs, values, and worldviews (Barker, 127).

Furthermore, the essay has the intention to follow a number of lines of investigation of the matter. Its major purpose is to develop and connect the multicultural generation of open-minded young people to other citizens, who might be considered living in the past, due to their strong beliefs in mono cultural traditions and customs. So, in order to achieve this goal, one must investigate the vast field of Cultural Studies.

In order to explain what Cultural Studies really consists of, we must relate to the word “culture”. According to Brian Longhurst, Greg Smith et alii, the term is easily defined in the book called *Introducing Cultural Studies*:

The term ‘culture’ has a complex history and diverse range of meanings in contemporary discourse. Culture can refer to Shakespeare or Superman comics, opera or football, who does the washing-up at home or how the office of the President of the United States of America is organised. Culture is found in your local street, in your own

city and country, as well as on the other side of the world. Small children, teenagers, adults and older people all have their own cultures; but they may also share a wider culture with others. (Brian Longhurst, 1)

Furthermore, we can assume that culture is everything that surrounds us in our real world. We can call a product of culture any object that comes from a cultural trend nowadays. Whether we agree or not to a particular set of cultural features, like manele music or drawings scribbled, scratched, or sprayed illicitly on a wall or other surface in a public place, for instance, we “breathe” culture every day.

So, in order to be open-minded to Multiculturalism, we must accept all sorts of mass culture that exists around us. In *The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies* one can find interesting pieces of information about Cultural Studies. 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. However, ‘cultural studies’ has no referent to which we can point; rather, it is constituted by the language-game of cultural studies. That is, the theoretical terms developed and deployed by persons calling their work cultural studies constitutes that which is ‘cultural studies’. (42)

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.

Nevertheless, cultural studies is a multi-disciplinary field of inquiry. Indeed, cultural studies draws important concepts from other theoretical domains critical amongst which have been Marxism, structuralism and not only. Today, most of cultural studies work is centred on the question of how the world is socially constructed and in particular with the themes of difference and identity. So, the central focus of cultural studies could be the exploration of culture in the vast multicultural societies nowadays.

Tariq Modood, a leading scholar of multiculturalism, is a professor of sociology who has for years been centering his research on racial equality, secularism and multiculturalism. He has written several articles on these topics that have appeared in the *Guardian*, and has published a series of books. According to Modood, multicultural citizens should keep their identities, take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language, or their religious affiliation (Modood, *Still Not Easy Being British* 72). He meticulously explains why national identity is so important to Muslims in Great Britain. With facts, he

vividly explains in his book why it is still not easy for a Muslim to be British and how the process of inclusion takes place.

A fortiori, his piece of writing is an attempt to look for a way in politics in order to include rather than exclude minorities who really want to be British. In Modood's words, what he offers is a version of multiculturalism which is compatible with and could be considered an invaluable reference resource for people interested in the fields of citizenship, multiculturalism, national identity and secularism.

Another example of Multiculturalism is the work of Suzanne Kamata. Her book *Losing Kei* tells the story of Jill Parker, an American landscape painter living in Japan, a "fish out of water" who makes ends meet as a lowly bar hostess. When she falls in love with Yusuke, a savvy and sensitive gallery owner, she begins to feel she might finally be accepted in her strange and beautiful adopted culture. But she discovers that in Japan, being the first-born denotes far more than order of birth. Yusuke is the chonan, an eldest son, responsible for the extended family's well-being and the upholding of tradition (Kamata 94).

Sparks fly when this contemporary American-born woman is likewise expected to assume the role of servile Japanese wife and live under the watchful eye of Okaasan, Yusuke's mother, the mother-in-law from hell. Even the long-anticipated birth of a son, Kei, fails to assuage their difficulties. Divorce is certainly an option. But in Japan a foreigner doesn't necessarily have rights to custody and Jill must choose between personal freedom and abandoning her child (Kamata, 102).

More multicultural features could be found in Alice Walker's book, called *The Color Purple*. This feminist novel about an abused and uneducated black woman's struggle for empowerment, was praised for the depth of its female characters and for its eloquent use of black English vernacular (McGhee, 88). *The Color Purple* documents the traumas and gradual triumph of Celie, a young African-American woman raised in rural isolation in Georgia, as she comes to resist the paralyzing self-concept forced on her by those who have power over her. Celie is repeatedly raped by her father, and gives birth twice as a result of the abuse, but assumes the children have been killed when her father secretly disposes of them. When a man proposes marriage to Celie's sister, Nettie, their father pushes him to take Celie instead, forcing her into a marriage as abusive as her early home (Walker, 55). Nettie soon flees that home, first to Celie and her husband and then out into the wide world. By the time of her reunion with Celie almost thirty years later, Nettie has met and traveled to Africa with an African-American missionary couple, whom she discovers to be the adoptive parents of Celie's children.

In Africa, Nettie lives among the Olinka, whose patriarchal society and indifference toward the role of Africans in the slave trade underline the prevalence of exploitation. Celie narrates her life through letters to God. These are prompted by her father's warning to tell "nobody but God" when he makes her pregnant for a second time at the age of fourteen, and she writes to God with the unselfconscious honesty of someone who thinks nobody is listening (Walker, 125).

As she builds relationships with other black women, and especially with those women engaging forcefully with oppression, however, Celie draws strength and insight

from their perspectives and develops a sense of her own right to interpret herself and her world. Her independence develops symbiotically through her expanded first and second hand experience of the world until she is able to construct her relations to others according to her own values.

Truly, this marvellous work of fiction won a Pulitzer Prize in 1983 and could be considered a turning point in modern thinking, related to Multiculturalism and its multiple facets. Sharing one's traditions and experiencing other's values could represent the key to all multicultural societies. Citizens should not retrain themselves from global thinking, as a regard to the society they live in. Multicultural citizenship does exist as long as people are fully aware of its magnitude worldwide. As Modood notes, the justification—both normative and pragmatic—for multiculturalism is the need to give respect to stigmatized or marginalized identities that are important to people and cannot be disregarded in the name of the individual, or for that matter, social cohesion, integration or citizenship.

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.

Citizens should not forget their cultural roots, they should not abandon their national identities, offered at birth. Above all, we belong to a certain nation, whether we like it or not, then we acquire a multicultural identity, if we desire. And how can we acquire a multicultural identity? The answer is quite simple: by enhancing others' cultural background, by observing their behaviour, their range of actions and their way of thinking. In other words, by being a fine and subtle observer of the diverse society we live in. Nobody should impose all these actions to us, otherwise, citizens would be subject of prohibited or imperative directions. This is not what Multiculturalism means.

Race, ethnicity, skin colour, religious beliefs and not only, all these form citizens' multicultural identity only if they have a full understanding of the term. Being open-minded in a multicultural society is the key to evolve and to enhance global differences.

A multicultural citizen is a person who can broaden his or her perspective, who can widen his or her cultural and social horizons, who can sail on uncharted seas or step on untrodden paths without the fear of rejection. That and only that particular citizen has the ingenuity and comprehension of the phenomenon of Multiculturalism, with all its various facets. That person is responsible for being open-minded regarding Culture, in general and Cultural Studies, in particular.

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 emphasis 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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