

From Diversity to Multiculturalism

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Abstract

Multiculturalism has become the major topic of modern social and political theory in particular and in contemporary social sciences in general. It has also occupied a fundamental place in public culture of western liberal democracies and in global political discourse as it is a way to respond to cultural diversity through emphasizing the importance of equal treatment of different communities in public sphere and in all aspects of life. Hence, multiculturalism approaches might be a solution to deal with conflict and intolerance that come out of differences by tolerating the existence of many varied and incompatible conceptual and moral ideals, many belief systems and decisive values.

Key-words: multiculturalism, diversity, recognition, difference

1. Introduction

Any society makes and constantly endorses new cultural norms and ideals. All human beings are born into a culture and lead their lives within a cultural context. Thus cultural neutrality seems to be out of reach, since any evolution of societal standards will necessarily privilege one notion over all others. Even the establishment of a liberal state with the aim of promoting as much cultural freedom as possible would fail to achieve true neutrality, as this political philosophy has to make a set of rules that not all cultures would accept. Culture then should be seen as both a

precondition for individual autonomy and a logical and inevitable consequence of his existence.

Besides, culture and society are indivisible in sense that there is no society without culture and no culture without society. Hence, the presence of different cultures in society brings diversity in human life. “Cultural pluralism”, “cultural diversity” and “multiculturalism” are the most common terms used to describe societies of multiple cultures, religions, languages and races. However, “plurality” suggests the existence of many cultures with no consideration of the way they relate to each other whereas diversity refers to multiplicity of separate entities which are different from one another. Furthermore, the concept of “multiculturalism” supports the idea of difference and heterogeneity that is represented in the concept of “diversity”. In modern societies the state is usually recognized as majority culture where the cultures that are different from this majority are mainly considered as minorities.

Moreover “pluralism” is not a new phenomenon, but the new thing about it is the development and spread of “diversity” in the world of ideas. “Pluralism” is a social fact that is represented in different beliefs, attitudes and ways of life. The pluralist world then should tolerate the existence of many varied and incompatible conceptual and moral ideals, many belief systems and decisive values to deal with conflict and intolerance that come out of differences.

2. Emergence of Multiculturalism

The last four decades of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of a bunch of intellectual and political movements led by various groups as the indigenous people, national minorities, old and new immigrants, feminist movements etc. They represent morals, ideologies and ways of life that are different from the dominant culture of the wider society. Their demands go far beyond the call for toleration. They want the wider society to treat them equally with the rest and to respect their differences so as to enable them to realize their identities in all aspects of life.

As a consequence of these different movements, multiculturalism emerged as a reference to a broad range of theories, attitudes, beliefs, norms, practices and policies that seek to provide public recognition and support for non-dominant cultural groups. However multicultural approach is different from social and cultural diversity as it goes beyond the basic civil and political liberties associated with liberal citizenship to bring a differentiated citizenship that allows group to express their identities and practices (Iverson 2011). According to Mahajan 2010, theorists of multiculturalism protest against any systematic discrimination, gives positive value to cultural diversity. Multiculturalism then becomes a way to respond to cultural diversity as it endorses the importance of equal treatment of different communities in public sphere.

Furthermore, multiculturalism has become the main topic of modern social and political theory in particular and in contemporary social sciences in general. It has also occupied a central place in public culture of western liberal democracies and in global political discourse. Now the multicultural ideas have spread to debate over the nature of global justice and the search for global norms of human rights. For Song 2010, multiculturalism is much associated with “identity politics,” “the politics of difference” and “the politics of recognition”, all of which share a devotion to reconsidering discriminated identities and changing dominant patterns of representation and communication that marginalize certain groups.

Though the traditional model of citizenship as common-rights is deeply connected to ideas of national integration, many groups like blacks, women, indigenous peoples, ethnic and religious minorities, etc feel segregated not because of their socio-economic status but because of their socio-cultural identity. They point out that the common rights citizenship disregards the needs of other groups. However the standards governing their claims cannot be derived from one culture alone but through an equal dialogue between different cultures based on the principle of justice and toleration. Consequently, multiculturalism approaches try to emphasize the need to have a stable identity and accentuate the importance of cultural belonging.

3. Main Contemporary Theorists of Multiculturalism

There are three well-known theorists, Iris Marion Young (1990), Charles Taylor (1994) and Bhikhu Parekh (2000), who have made major contributions to what May et al (2004) have described as the "multicultural turn" in recent social and political theory. It is claimed that these three in particular have defined in their works the key aspects that construct a multicultural society. The aim, therefore, is not to offer a descriptive explanation and overview, but to identify some points of convergence that help further understanding of the ideas of difference, diversity and recognition that constitute the politics and theories of multiculturalism.

3.1 Iris Marion Young and Difference

In her book *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Iris Marion Young (1990) is hostile to approaches of political assimilation which compel minorities to reject their own distinctiveness in a process of cultural assimilation to the dominant standards, values and customs of that society. In Young's view such a requirement is unfair because "assimilation always implies coming to the game after it is already begun, after the rules and standards have been set, and having to prove oneself accordingly" (1990: 165). Although Young states that there are different types of assimilation which can seek to integrate different cultural aspects, what they all share in common is the unequal burden of change that they place upon the minority.

Young's work is a response to the view that citizenship achieved through individual rights alone, based upon rejection of difference, can match principles of social justice, for example, demoting differences to the private authority in favour of equal treatment in the public sphere. By emphasizing the context of groupings that are formed upon non-voluntary aspects of social identity, she accentuates the unequal impact of past dominance or present problem. She thus argues that focusing upon individuals does not take into consideration how citizenship already fails to treat people equally, or where "blindness to group difference disadvantages groups whose experience, culture and socialized capacities differ from those of privileged groups" (ibid. 165). Hence, the fact of not being attentive to group differences may lead to a

form of repression in itself and/or can contribute to further oppression:

... by allowing norms expressing the point of view and experiences of privileged groups to appear neutral and universal. [...] Because there is no such 'unsituated' group-neutral point of view, the situation and experience of dominant groups tends to define the norms of any such humanity in general. Against such a supposedly neutral humanist ideal, only the oppressed groups come to be marked with particularity; they, and not the privileged groups, are marked, objectified as the others. (Young, 1990: 165)

In holding this view, she offers an opposition to the idea of neutrality presented by Du Bois in his description of "the operation of the veil". Since "privileged groups implicitly define the standards according to which all will be measured... their privilege involves not recognizing these standards as culturally and experientially specific" (Young, 1990: 165). Du Bois' veil imagines that those who are 'veiled' become visible by dominant society as opposing the 'norm', while those in front of it may not see anything other than their own legal dominance. It was claimed that this presents a reversed version of Rawls's (1971) 'veil of ignorance', which means for Young that the minority looks out from behind a socially constructed inequality, in full awareness of significant aspects of their identity. She argues that:

When participation is taken to imply assimilation, the oppressed person is caught in an irresolvable dilemma: to participate means to accept or adopt an identity one is not, to try to participate means to be reminded by oneself and others of the identity one is. (Young: *ibid*)

The sense of looking at oneself through the eyes of another, according to Young, is a form of cultural recognition which relates one's own cultural identity to the cultural identities of other members of one's community. Consequently, the harm caused by prejudice is not only due to the unconcealed hostility from the majority, but also arise from minority invisibility in not being recognized or represented as a legitimate part of society. This links to Young's criticism that it is an uncooperative liberal obsession to take for granted that a person can be detached from the dependent

aspects of their social identity, history and culture. In other words, Young's support for institutional integration of group identities into a democratic cultural pluralism can

settle a general system of rights that is the same for all:

... a democratic public should provide mechanisms for the effective recognition and representation of the distinct voices and perspectives of those of its constituent groups that are oppressed or disadvantaged. Such group representation implies institutional mechanisms and public resources supporting self organization of group members so that they achieve collective empowerment and a reflective understanding of their collective experience and interests in the context of society; group analysis and group generation of proposals in institutionalized contexts where decision makers have taken group perspectives into consideration... (ibid: 184)

Young's view is mainly based on advocating policies that can incorporate the recognition and integration of minorities in a reorganized public sphere with the aim of preventing minorities from being neglected or oppressed by majorities.

3.2 Charles Taylor and Recognition

In his account of the emergence of a modern politics of identity (1994), Taylor implies that the idea of 'recognition' has emerged away from historically distinct or inherited hierarchies as the only basis of social status or honour, and towards a notion of dignity matching the principles of a democratic society that guarantee political equality and a full civic status to all its citizens. Dating back to 1989, in his account of the emergence of the modern self, Taylor defines two policies of "equality". The first is based on politics of universalism, with the view of affording equal dignity to all citizens in a society; and the second represents a politics of difference where the distinctiveness of context, history and identity is prominent.

For Taylor, the concept of "recognition" has given rise to a search for 'authenticity' away from the unbending universalism that supports ideas of the "Just" or the "Right", in favour of the accomplishment and realisation of one's true self. As a result, according to Taylor, people can no longer be recognised on the basis of

identities shaped by their positions in social hierarchies alone but, rather, through considering how people build up their identities. The boundary between these two issues “dignity” and “difference” forms the basis of Taylor's account of the politics of recognition, expressed as a “dialogical interlocutor”.

Taylor's emphasis on the importance of `dialogical' relationships, implies the fact that we define our identity "always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us" (1994: 33). He suggests that our idea of ourselves, what we claim to be, and what we really think we are, can rely on how others come to view us to the extent that our sense of self is developed in a continuing dialogue. Self-consciousness exists "only by being acknowledged or recognised", in a way that a sense of socio-cultural self-esteem evolves not only from personal identity, but also in relation to the group in which this identity is developed:

....our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm; can be a form of oppression, imprisoning some in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (Taylor, 1994:25-26)

It is worth noting here how Taylor's characterizes liberalism as a `fighting creed' and what this means to the ‘being’ fought:

Liberalism is not a possible meeting ground for all cultures, and quite incompatible with other ranges. ...[A]s many Muslims are well aware, Western liberalism is not so much an expression of the secular, post religious outlook that happens to be popular amongst liberal intellectuals as a more organic outgrowth of Christianity... All this is to say that liberalism is also a fighting creed. (Taylor, 1994: 62)

What Taylor stresses here is "a particularism masquerading as the universal" (ibid. 43). At the same time, he defines the limits of his own conception of recognition politics, concluding that the confines marking the legitimacy of recognition politics must be drawn somewhere, and that nowhere is more suitable than on issues of Muslim claims-making. Taylor states, because in Islam "there is no question of separating politics and religion in the way we have come to expect in Western liberal

society" (ibid. 62). Nevertheless, Taylor's idea of recognition does not exclude any minority claims-making from the process of politics.

3.3 Bhikhu Parekh and Diversity

Cultural diversity and social pluralism are of a fundamental value because they challenge people to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their own cultures and ways of life. This differentiates Parekh from liberals and communitarians. The latter might admit that cultures can play an important role in making choices meaningful for their members (Kymlicka, 1995), or that different cultures increase autonomy by providing further 'options' in ways of living for society as a whole (Raz, 1986). However, such different views imply that culture is vital for individual group members but, they could not explain why cultural diversity is necessary in itself. To this Parekh suggests the following clarification:

Since human capacities and values conflict, every culture realizes a limited range of them and neglects, marginalizes and suppresses others. However rich it may be, no culture embodies all that is valuable in human life and develops the full range of human possibilities. Different cultures thus correct and complement each other, expand each other's horizon of thought and alert each other to new forms of human fulfillment. The value of other cultures is independent of whether or not they are options for us... inassimilable otherness challenges us intellectually and morally, stretches our imagination, and compels us to recognize the limits of our categories of thought. (Parekh, 2000: 167)

Thus Parekh' position suggests that each culture has something to teach others, people should be allowed to develop moral and aesthetic awareness for humanity as a whole. This is an issue of plurality as a consequence of particularity. What is being promoted is both a deepening of cultural particularities and a broadening of these insights from different cultures. Parekh's (2000: 167-168) argues that cultural diversity "fosters... human freedom as self-knowledge, self-transcendence and self criticism."

4. Conclusion

Multiculturalism recognizes the difference through institutional and policy reforms that take into account the claims of marginalized group. According to Modood (2007) when we speak of difference rather than culture from the sociological standpoint is to recognize the difference not only from the inside (i.e. from the side of the minority culture) but also from the outside (i.e. outside treatment towards these minorities in question). It also admits the nature of the minorities and their relationship with the rest of the societies. Multiculturalism is not, therefore only about cultural rights instead of political equality and economic opportunities. It is also the politics which recognizes the post-immigrant groups and creates awareness that these group differentiating cultural aspects are essential to their social construction.

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