



Cultural Identity in Multicultural Societies

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ABSTRACT

In an era of rapid globalization, the notion of cultural identity has become increasingly complex and dynamic. This paper examines how cultural identity is formed, preserved, and challenged within multicultural societies, addressing historical developments, the role of language, cultural practices, globalization's impact, and the intricate processes of identity formation in youth. While globalization fosters cross-cultural exchanges, it simultaneously threatens indigenous cultures and promotes homogenization. Additionally, the paper examines the mental health implications of fragmented cultural identities and the pivotal role education plays in promoting genuine intercultural understanding. By critically engaging with historical, social, and psychological dimensions, this study argues for a nuanced approach to cultural identity one that balances the need for global integration with the preservation of cultural diversity and personal belonging.

Keywords: Cultural Identity, Multiculturalism, Globalization, Language and Culture, Identity Formation, Tradition, Mental Health.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the global community that now inhabits cyberspace has imposed different social realities worldwide. Owing to the Internet and e-media, a wave of globalization surged across many borders, reshaping the world we live in, seemingly bringing cultures together as one. However, the process of globalization has been accompanied by the resurgence of ethnic identities and an increasingly politicized struggle for culture. Some argue that globalization has led to a homogenization of the world in which local cultures are either obliterated or transformed to conform to a single model, while others contend that people draw upon their cultural identities/roots and creative practices to employ them politically, economically, socially, and culturally in the global space. Such overdrawn but yet contradictory portrayals of cultural realities have led cultural studies scholars to question whether people are more alike than different in the anthropological sense, and if globalization homogenizes the world beyond recognition. In today's increasingly multicultural societies, where diversity is often idealized, the idea of cultural identity becomes perplexing and multifaceted. Cultural identity can be defined as individuals' understandings of themselves as members of diverse cultural communities. It addresses the meaning of being an individual with a complex historical legacy and multiple socio-political identities grounded in networks of ongoing relationships with other individuals, communities, and cultures. Since the 1950s, the idea of cultural identity has traveled across various disciplines, including anthropology, cultural studies, and psychology. Given its fluid meaning, questions of cultural identity cannot but be complicated, intertwined, and vexed. In addition, the term 'multicultural' itself can mean different things. This text is inspired by considerations about its significance in different disciplines on one hand, and by its caveat and challenges in understanding and describing a world full of ethnic complexities on the other [1, 2].

Defining Multiculturalism

The notion of multiculturalism, introduced in Canada and Australia in the 1970s, has played a key role in the management of ethnic pluralism within the state. With the decline of cultural homogeneity, a

consequence of globalization, it has become a vital part of the political agenda in modern democratic states. A multicultural society is one in which individuals' cultural and ethnic differences are seen as a contribution to social development for all. Some of the functions of multiculturalism include the inclusion of individuals' identity in society, ensuring human dignity, providing a framework for the reconciliation of different identities, thus stabilizing political life and maintaining social peace. In academia, multiculturalism has raised questions about identity, alterity, difference, and otherness. As globalization shrinks the world, a multiplicity of identity questions arises, both at the level of the individual and the society as a whole. Multiculturalism is one of the ideological and political responses to the plight of cultural diversity in modernity. There is a difference between multiculturalism and multiculturalism. Multiculturalism refers to the coexistence of diverse cultural groups within a political community. Multiculturalism is a political concept that defines the institutions and mechanisms for the recognition and respect of cultural differences. Multiculturalism operates at two levels: the societal level and the individual level. At the societal level, it institutionalizes the recognition of cultural communities, accepts social integration along the lines of pluralism and equality, and prevents essentialist reductionism of cultural communities. It is directed against racism, xenophobia, and other misinterpretations of difference [3, 4].

Historical Context of Multicultural Societies

The term "multicultural" was coined in the political discourse or introduced to the political practice since the 1970s and earlier, though its academic discourse had a longer history. It had mostly been shaped in the West, particularly in those nation-states that had been the host-societies for post-World War II waves of immigration from former colonies or a more recent recruitment of Pakistanis, Algerians, Moroccans, and Turks. Not long afterwards, and with mixed success, it had been transplanted: in Australia and New Zealand, or the post-communist Central and Eastern European nation-states. In the English-speaking world, the decade of the 1990s had been marked by a heated (and heatedly politicized) transfer of the term "multicultural" to debates about the so-called multicultural society. This transfer had been focused on defining what a multicultural society was (and what it should be), and designing theoretical solutions on how tensions and conflicts in a multicultural society should be managed. Diversity had been one of the nouns referring to the emerging, but usually ill-defined, notion of a new emerging object of investigation. It had also been a battleground for the defenders and opponents of multiculturalism, especially concerning uncontrolled immigration and the looming Islamization of Europe. Some even accused it of being a politically correct euphemism for multiculturalism. However, most of the answers had been short or even very short. Some authors denied the very existence of a multicultural society, declaring that "a society is either monocultural or multicultural". In such societies, various ethnic, cultural, civilizational or other groups coexist, but their cultural differences or multiplicity is usually recognized "(in the social realm) and this multiplicity is constructed as an object of policy, administrative and other deliberative practice, regulated in an asymmetrical regulatory framework". Quite the opposite, a monocultural society is "one in which people of one ethnic origin make up a vast majority of its population who share the same language, religion, culture, and history" [5, 6].

The Role of Language in Cultural Identity

When examining cultural identity, researchers focus on two key aspects: how cultural diversity components influence identity, and how overall cultural diversity developments impact identity. This broader inquiry explores the experience of multiple identities in multilingual environments, emphasizing language and cultural identity theories. Multiculturalism is perceived to reject traditional national concepts in favor of transnationalism and diminishing state roles, although some argue that this leads to fragmentation and cultural division. States are viewed as entities formed from land, people, language, and culture, united through identity formation following imperialism, colonialism, and regionalism. Inclusive attitudes towards cultural differences challenge outdated notions of fixed communities and racialized national identities, often considered inadequate in explaining contemporary dynamics. The current waves of globalization, migration, and diaspora present both threats and opportunities for post-Westphalian constructs, creating uncertainties and fluid environments. Democratic movements emerging in response to these factors could transform states into adaptive cultural systems resistant to perceived threats from "alien" influences. Language is defined broadly, as per Ferguson's framework, as a communication medium influencing expression and interaction, highlighting the complexity of linguistic practices as social phenomena. Language's systemic role in society creates distinct spheres, giving rise to global, regional, and local languages influenced by cultural and practical needs. Language policies and practices in migrant contexts are examined for their effects on new cultural identities, generational conflicts, and

globalization, facilitating a better understanding of language and cultural diversity's role in cultural identity processes across various settings [7, 8].

Cultural Practices and Traditions

Tradition is an organism, imbued with life, and, as with any living being, it has a past as well as a history. It is constantly modified or renewed by practices adjusted to new circumstances and conditions. When it comes to traditions shared by people of the same stock, one may consider any tradition as a combination of local and cultural dialects expressed at various levels. Its continuing existence is efficacious until some other mode of expression is invented, based on humanist attitudes, historical awareness, new anthropological insights, or influence of any civilizations, regions, or countries, where it turns into its opposite, 'culture of traditions,' e.g., ethnofolklore or artificial folk style of performance. In a diaspora, where its socio-cultural environment is absent, tradition merely wears out; either once chanted becomes silent or sporadically shown upon 'primary' request by outsiders. So, tradition may simultaneously respond to and be enforced by debilitating if not hindering controllable and uncontrollable social, political, juridical, economic, military, etc. forces termed constraints. Folk customs are the behaviors and events differently regulated and ritualized in the observance of festive cycles (day, week, month, year, life, etc.) or of transitory phenomena (e.g., illness, death, etc.) considered as socially significant or some symbolic meta-social event (e.g., a pact, atonement, renewal, disappearance, transformation, etc.). These cultural phenomena have been passed down through oral tradition in an unbroken chain throughout generations. They are characterized by considerable cultural vitality and continuity, integral formalities and superficial rigidity, symbolic, mythic, religious, and political meanings, as well as being the bearers of diverse cultural values. Villages or towns are bearers of local /regional variants or dialects of a culture. Outside the local environment, they wear off, become folkloric, accompanied by degradation, artificiality, and impairment, and finally vanish absolutely [9, 10].

Impact of Globalization on Cultural Identity

While globalization opens up opportunities for trade and communication and promotes the development of international organizations that encourage dialogue, intercultural exchanges, and mutual respect, it unavoidably has cultural and social consequences. As a consequence, mainstream cultural products have proliferated across the globe, which have threatening local, indigenous, and small-scale cultures worldwide in their chance to thrive. Globalization has been a double-edged sword in this regard, on the one hand, gaining abundant western resources and culturally-driven commodities, and on the other hand, presenting a challenge and threat to the preservation of one's identity, language, or belief. From a historical perspective, the emergence of globalization is not unusual, and arguably, it would happen sooner or later. The Renaissance first took place in Italy and was propelled by Phoenician traders. Subsequently, it spread to England, France, and the Netherlands before pervading into the New World and Eastern Asia, and then the rest of the world. The discovery of the Americas opened up new trading routes, products, and resources. Likewise, scholars from Asia and recoveries of the Greek manuscripts to the West triggered the Age of Discoveries, and scientific resources exchanged along those routes gave rise to a scientific revolution and the Industrial Revolution, with each new globalized network attempting to respond against the preceding one. Cultural identity in Asia has changed rapidly over the past century with globalization. Historical impacts by Western colonial powers have shaped the current political and cultural landscape, with rapid modernization and Westernization. Brainwashing through education systems, novels, films, and paintings has once swiped off a nation's potentiality and creativity in cultural production. Without cultural knowledge and confidence, people might adopt a self-defeating option—censoring and denying one's cultural identity, leading to loathing, tragedy, confusion, and incapability to react against or generate new cultural production. Repression of cultural identity simply reinforces growing Western cultural dominance and capitalist colonization [11, 12].

Identity Formation in Adolescents

The process of identity formation for youth growing up in multicultural familial contexts has also gained the attention of some researchers. This is a topic that has been explored in various ways. For example, some researchers have looked at young people who lived in several cultures because of their relocation in different geographical contexts. Others have explored the youth in Australia who lived in one culture but had grown up with another one because of their parents' migration. In Canada, there are also young people who, in addition to considering themselves Canadian, are also members of multicultural homes that have several heritages mostly different from the Euro-Canadian culture. This means that these young people potentially experience several cultures and may find themselves codeswitching between several meaning systems. These identities can differ in their salience depending on several factors. The research questions that this study addresses are: how do the youth who grew up in a multicultural

environment experience the process of social, personal, and ego identity formation? The presentation of findings starts with social and cultural identity. This encompasses questions addressing young people's sense of belonging to the different cultures available to them. Personal identity is also addressed, and it explores the choices of young people in terms of beliefs, values, career, and significant relationships. Ego identity is discussed through the narratives of the young people. The targeted population for this study was young people aged between 18 and 25. Based on Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, young people at this age are phasing out of adolescence and becoming young adults. Arnett, for instance, labeled this process as emerging adulthood, which is characterized by a peak in identity exploration, instability, focus on the self, and feeling in between adulthood and adolescence. Emerging adults engage in love life exploration in a way that is different than adolescents; the focus is on what type of people they are looking for to form lasting relationships. They also engage in educational and occupational choices exploration that is available to them [13, 14].

Challenges to Cultural Identity

Cultural identity encompasses common patterns of perceptions, gestures, behaviors, music, art, oral and written literatures, attitudes, values, and beliefs of a given social group or society. It creates a feeling of belonging among individuals participating in the culture's everyday processes. Culture also preserves history: lengthy participation builds a community's symbols of self-presentation. The historical richness of cultures gives some noticed importance to cultural identity grounded in it. Cultural heritage inspires a sense of kinship among individuals sharing cultural symbols. Personalities associated with cultures build the rationale for differentiations from others, leading to cultural identity preservation troubles as individuals transmute places. The dialectic nature of culture attains altercations, undergoing changes and modifications. Therefore, cultural transition emerges without cultural eliminations or dissolutions being more appropriate. Cultures hybridizing render it more difficult to possess a distinct identity. Thereby, difficulties in identity formation and notions of rootlessness, homelessness, and in-betweenness, among others, arise. Cultural differences propel altercations in regions encompassing multi-ethnic social groups. Further, power inequalities among the ethnic groups forming a multi-ethnic domain result in saliency within their cultural gaps. The elite struggle of the dominant group to maintain its hegemony causes the subordinating groups to rise in counteraction. The cosmopolitan perception cultivated in the distinct philosophy of city life is still obscured by the shadow of its imperialistic past. The cultural security of the state and disintegration concerns have manipulated the ethnic groups' identities into malicious contours. The requirement of ardent nationalist identities slashing ontological needs represents an ideology in the interests of the state elite. The reality of societal processes shaped by the conflicts of cultural groups in multi-cultural societies is an emblem of the massive lack of communication between ethnic groups' cultural identities [15, 16].

Cultural Identity and Mental Health

Cultural identity is a central part of the human experience and has a profound impact on our sense of well-being and our own mental and physical health within the context of our respective societies. While cultural background refers to our ethnicity, it is also the influence of our family, social class, religion, migration, geography, gender, and sexual orientation that mold who we are as diverse human beings. One experience often common to all persons, regardless of ethnic group, is the migration experience. It may be for education, work, or economic reasons, or the more serious issues of flight from violence, war, persecution, and natural calamities. Irrespective of the reasons, migration to a new country involves settling into a different environment and social context, which is bound to elicit differing degrees of cultural and subsequent identity dissonance and realignment. Based on lived experiences in the North American Diaspora, this article will examine the experience of cultural identity losses and reformation, the impact of a fragmented identity on the psyche of individuals, and the effects on mental health. It will also provide psychiatric considerations regarding the disruption of and adaptations to cultural identity for health professionals working in multicultural societies. Presently, the acceptance of physical and mental health services by immigrants and refugees is generally low, and their health is often disregarded due to the more urgent practical concerns of migration. Moreover, mental health issues of such groups remain hidden, unrecognized, and invisible due to stigma, personal reluctance to pursue assistance, and institutional racism within mainstream health services. A better understanding of the issues and context of the migrant experience can benefit the mental health care of immigrants [17, 18].

The Role of Education in Cultural Identity

When considering the messages that are sent to individuals who might have a different cultural background, some principles can be identified. Cultural understanding should not mean simply regarding differences as 'nice', being 'tolerant', or 'respectful'. Cultures are not equivalent; indeed, prejudice is often

based on different measures of cultural supremacy in different cultures. Cultures help shape the thinking of individuals who dwell in them. If individuals think differently, their 'mindset' can lead them to conclusions that seem baffling, ludicrous, or horrendous to an outsider. Equality and respect do not in themselves eliminate differences. To disregard differences in identity while demanding equity in interaction constitutes the most pernicious kind of ethnocentrism. Tolerance alone is thus inadequate as a framework for mutual understanding within multicultural societies. To develop strategies for dialogue and cooperation amongst parties from diverse cultural perspectives in multicultural societies, the social and political economic circumstances obtaining in various parts of the world should be taken into account. Each society has its historical legacy of cultural interactions. In societies like Western Europe and North America that received large-scale immigration in the past four decades, issues of race, ethnicity, and culture loom large in public and political discourse. In parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, cultural pluralism has historically been linked to colonialism and domination, questions of decolonization and voice. In many places, the milieu is inhospitable to multiculturalism. Ethno-cultural identities are inextricably and violently tied to questions of sovereignty and territoriality. And yet, whatever the displayed divergence, the legitimacy of diversity and cultural difference is a 'universal' principle both sought and promulgated by nations [19, 20].

Policy Implications for Multicultural Societies

The concept of cultural identity has often been viewed as fixed in terms of sociopolitical meanings. Once formed, cultural identity becomes a manifestation of social status or reference group. It is something people have, own, and control irrespective of the social impacts of their identity. However, that view is increasingly untenable, especially in light of growing public upheaval against identity politics in many democratic and multicultural societies. Harnessing the power of sociocultural identity for the betterment of society is at odds with the perception that identity either stands alone as a fluid categorical position or is permanently enshrined without room for re-evaluation or change. Growing populist narratives have capitalized on the inability to see and address the socio-political elements in the encapsulation of identities. The targets have been liberal institutions such as migration, multiculturalism, or the public service. Some scholars have been critical of the notion of integration itself, arguing that it is another discursive form of exclusion. Multiculturalism has been attacked as emphasizing diversity and difference at the expense of universalism and commonality. Claims have been made that multicultural identities are less stable and essential than national identities as they are based on interactions across cultures, and thus more fluid and changeable. At the same time, some claims fixed identities are necessary for stability and continuity, as well as for social cohesion, social justice, and social welfare. In contemporary discourses, seeing and re-evaluating cultural identity as a resource will reduce such tensions and promote healthy social development. Being active agents of cultural identity relies on the comprehension of both modes of cultural identity. Being aware of both the reificatory and resisting modes is crucial for navigating the public perception of cultural identities. The ability to do so will enable individuals to re-evaluate how different accounts of cultural identity are implicitly or explicitly applied in the public discourses to expose their normative underpinnings, logical flaws, and potential social dangers [21, 22].

Case Studies of Multicultural Societies

Being bicultural does not necessarily indicate the intention of creating a compatible hybrid identity. Past studies indicate that children of immigrants appropriated identities that diverged from each other. The issue of cultural closeness and identification with the host and heritage cultures varies across individuals. Turkish-Heritage and Latino individuals diverge in their cultural integration due to differences in acculturation standards and ethnic group attitudes towards the host country. Most Turkish people have settled in Austria without the intention of permanent migration. Due to failing European policies, immigrants, children of immigrants, and mixed families seem stuck in cultural gaps. One participant who reported a conflict between heritage and host cultures explained that her Turkish boyfriend's inability to come out to his parents was insurmountable. Such unyielding referents limited any possibility of a hybrid identity. Participants of mixed-culture families exhibited conflicting alignments to different cultures. Participants employed compartmentalization and non-categorized, seemingly random switches in cultural codes to fit in sociocultural contexts. However, control failures or failure to fit in the dominant identity led to isolation or despair. Individuals falling under the category of third culture kids (TCKs) in Trinidad and Tobago were studied regarding their personal and cultural identity. They were children of expatriate parents who had moved to Trinidad and Tobago for work, military, or the oil industry. Participants tended to espouse characteristics of multiple cultures, while also requesting their ethnicity. The qualitative research method was used to analyze and explore questions differently. This study examined a specific age range (16-23) of emotional elements. These TCKs were mostly excited, curious, and

somewhat anxious about their cultural identity and presence on the island until they had recently settled in for undergraduate education. Analyzing how TCKs treat their cultural identities achieved in a Trinidadian context helped elucidate peripheral areas in TCK and cultural adaptation research. Though TCKs may develop multiple cultural identities with diverse and evolving perceptions, cultures are indeed salient to youth identity development [23, 24].

Future Directions in Cultural Identity Research

Although multiculturalism has been articulated as a challenging and ongoing process as people grow up with different cultures, races, and religions, researchers have predominantly adopted an assessment model of cultural identity. It has been recognised that cultural identity is unique, but what is not recognised is that it takes time to thoroughly explore the culture, which has led to knowledge gaps. The present study aimed to shed light on how multicultural people gradually go through the process of cultural identity formation. The findings provided a comprehensive understanding of how cultural identity formation was perceived by the youth growing up in multiculturally rich familial contexts. Surprisingly, the cultural identity was learnt primarily as a function of the family context, with a moderate degree of learning based on socialising agents from the outside world. As this research was conducted with the youth who had a systematic multicultural context, the family contexts enriched in different cultural practices enhance knowledge on how multicultural people best explore their cultural identity, which often lays the foundations for a comprehensive understanding of culture. As they grow up, families attempt to enlighten the cultural practices of the traditions and religions that they believe in. With that regard, learning the cultural practices is perceived as the first step in understanding culture and developing a long, deep connection. Often, the diverse mastery of multicultural practices affects the quality of learning. Moreover, diverse mastery appears to be common among monoculturals. The native culture is emphasised as the basic cultural context that they are always exposed to. Hence, it tends to be learnt well as it serves as the primary source of knowledge where an extensive fund of information is available. Among the cultural practices perceived to be learnt to be fully cultured, the successive learning of culture has been articulated as a likely factor to understand monocultural learning. However, the assimilation of various practices significantly differs from culture to culture, and a strict comparison should only be made between cultures that share similar features [25, 26].

CONCLUSION

Cultural identity in multicultural societies stands at a crossroads shaped by the dual forces of globalization and local resilience. While globalization offers new opportunities for interaction and growth, it also endangers cultural uniqueness and traditional practices. In increasingly diverse societies, the formation and negotiation of cultural identities are influenced by historical legacies, language, generational shifts, and socio-political contexts. Youth, in particular, navigate complex identity pathways that reflect both heritage and emerging global influences. Education, inclusive policies, and mental health awareness are vital in fostering environments where cultural differences are not merely tolerated but genuinely respected and integrated. Ultimately, preserving cultural identity requires active engagement, critical reflection, and a commitment to recognizing diversity as a foundation for social cohesion and human flourishing.

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