Multiculturalism: Some Implications for Sustainable Development in Africa

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Abstract

The history of philosophy is characterized by the emergence of ideologies or philosophies that have influenced social relations at one time or the other. Multiculturalism is one of such philosophies. As a philosophy of association or cultural and social relations, this paper argues that it is an indispensable tool for Africa's integration, and consequently sustainable development.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, implication, sustainable, development, Africa

1. Introduction

The history of philosophy and indeed humanity has been characterized by the emergence of trends, movements, ideas or ideologies which have held sway at one time or the other. While some of these have changed human relations, perceptions, and attitudes remarkably, others have lacked followership and support. Notwithstanding their short comings, each had roles and place in human history and collectively had aided human advancement. In the last decade or so, the philosophy of multiculturalism has held sway with differing perceptions of its implications. In some quarters it is an alternative to the policy of assimilation, while for others it is actually an alternative to the policy of differentialism.

While assimilation sees ethnic and cultural differences as transitory and capable of disappearing overtime as a result of full political, social and cultural incorporation of minorities into a nation or state, differentialism insist on separate identities and commitments of ethnic and cultural groups. Rather than investigating these contentions, this essay aspires to highlight some of the implications of multiculturalism for a sustainable development in Africa. Let us examine in some detail what multiculturalism is.

2. Multiculturalism: Background, Meaning and Types

Multiculturalism as a philosophy of association, or cultural and social relations is some few decades old. Bostock (1981) notes in this regard that:

> The term multiculturalism was coined in Canada in the 1960's and was used by the Trudeau Government to try to promote harmony between the pre-dominant French-Canadian and British-Canadian cultures, as well as with the various minority cultures (p.32).

Multiculturalism thus emerged more or less as a social policy with positive objectives, namely; to assimilate, harmonize and enhance unity in the midst of diversity. Multiculturalism is the recognition and acceptance of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity and the demand for an equitable status for all such cultural communities.

The above goal notwithstanding, there are minor identifiable differences or traits in the conception of multiculturalism that have found expressions in the last decades. Demographic, prescriptive or normative, holistic and liberal or political multiculturalism are some of predominant types of multiculturalism. We need to examine them piece-meal as such attempt will aid in the proper estimation and understanding of multiculturalism.

Demographic or descriptive trait or usage refers to the existence of linguistically, culturally and ethnically diverse segment in the composition or make up of a state. It entails the assertion that because a society is composed of people from different backgrounds, such a society should be viewed as multicultural. The weakness of demographic or descriptive multiculturalism is in its failure to state explicitly or categorically at what point a society is multicultural. For instance, is it a matter of scale or proportion? Does the demographic status of a state change as one or ten foreigners visit and thereafter settle down in such a state?

Prescriptive or normative multiculturalism on it part is idealistic in character. It is the idea that modern societies ought to embrace the necessity of distinct cultural groups with equal cultural and political status. Hence Petro

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Georgiou (1984) argues that for some "a truly multicultural society would make provision for the use of all languages in everyday affairs, including official's transactions" (p.135). Normative or prescriptive multiculturalism though appears utopia provides a yardstick or pattern that guides in the determination of how much a society is multicultural in nature, depending on it closeness to the pattern.

Political multiculturalism emphasizes the active promotion of cultural pluralism by government. It encourages migrants to remain within a state as separate "ethnic groups" In this sense political multiculturalism is programmatic and at variance with a normal cultural trend. Political multiculturalism is closely related to Holistic multiculturalism which promote the belief that the maintenance of 'many' or 'plural' cultures within a nation is valuable both to the ethnic groups specially and to the nation as a whole.

Holistic multicultural unlike political thus promote a mode of living whereby every person maintains whatever it desire of his or her culture and identify without prejudice. Though holistic promotes the role of choice unlike political multiculturalism, there is an enormous practical difficulty with it. Is it really possible for a migrant to bring into a host culture practices strange and alien to it without any reaction from the host?

Lastly, liberal multiculturalism emphasizes on cultural diversity and celebrating ethnic variety. It assumes the existence of pre-existing cultures which relate and interact with each other, but does not examine the hierarchies of power underpinning these interactions.   This failure to examine the hierarchies of power and the multifarious implication of such interaction is a serious flaw of the liberal position.

From our discussion above two different understanding of multiculturalism are deducible. Firstly, is the understanding of multiculturalism as interaction and communication between different cultures. Such interaction creates opportunities for different cultures to engage themselves and consequently resulting in multiculturalism. Secondly, the understanding that cultural isolation can protect and also contribute to global cultural diversity and uniqueness. A typical example of the second is the French policy of "cultural exception" introduced in 1993 in General Agreement on Tariff and Trade (GATT) which aimed at France cultural safety.

When different cultures cooperate or relate with each other, these two broad understanding of multiculturalism results in dissimilar strategies. However, the two understanding are not absolutely distinct from each other as they are better viewed as complementing each other ultimately.
Borrowing, Fernando Ortiz term "trans culturalism" as an indicator or a transaction of one culture with another, the point is that in a cultural environment cultures are not simply interacting and isolating, rather all work together at the same time, but affecting different aspects of cultures to create a new form of culture. This understanding seems to be the cardinal point that multiculturalism promotes.

Multiculturalism can thus be associated with re-valuing disrespected identities, or with an economic cum political demand that remedies be provided for the economic and political disadvantages that people suffer as a result of their minority status. Multiculturalism take for granted that it is "culture" and 'cultural groups' that are to be recognized and accommodated, yet their claim include a wide range of claims involving religion, language, ethnicity, nationality and race. This should not appear surprising because culture is a broad concept incorporating most or all of these subjects.

Perhaps it is appropriate at this point to examine the aims and justification for multiculturalism. This is important in view of our primary objective in this essay.

3. Reviewing the Aims and Justification of Multiculturalism

Jerry Zubrzycki has argued that the three basic aims of multiculturalism are ethnic cultural identity, a more socially cohesive nation and equal access to social resources. Brain Bullivant (1983) though raises doubts about the rhetoric of multiculturalism, admits these three aims have dominated official statements about multiculturalism, but notes that a fourth one is often added namely; equal responsibility for, commitment to and participation in society.

These aims provide a basis for some of the justification of multiculturalism. Communitarians reject the belief that the individual is prior to the community, and that the value of social goods can be reduced to their contributions to individual well-being. Ontological holism which views social goods as "irreducibly social" characterizes their fundamental belief.

This holist view of collective identities and cultures underlies Charles Taylor's normative case for multicultural policies of recognition. Diverse cultural identities and languages are irreducible social goods which should be

presumed to be of equal worth; according to him. Such recognition requires replacing the traditional liberal regime of identical liberties and opportunities for all citizens with a scheme of special rights for minority cultural groups.

The second justification comes from liberalism. Based on the liberal views of autonomy and equality kymlicka (1989) for instance argues to the effect that culture is said to be instrumentally valuable to individuals because it assures individuals autonomy and self-respect. With reference to the communitarian theory, kymlicka (1985) maintains that there is a deep connection between a person's self-respect and the respect accorded to the cultural group of which he belongs. Ones culture thus needs to be secured in view of the difficulty of giving it up.

Kymlicka (1989) argues from these premises about the instrumental value of cultural membership to the egalitarian claim that because members of minority groups are disadvantaged in terms of access to their own culture as against the majority groups, they are entitled to a special protection. This view reflects the central idea in luck egalitarianism – the view that individuals should be held responsible for inequalities resulting from their own choices and not those from unchosen circumstances.

Kymlicka (1985) maintains that inequality in access to cultural membership in a minority culture stem from luck and not one's own choices. The minority culture can reasonably demand that members of majority culture share in bearing the cost of accommodation. Hence, Kymlicka (1985) argues that minority rights are justified "within a liberal egalitarian theory …which emphasizes the importance of rectifying unchosen inequalities" (p.109).

The other justification (post colonial) look beyond liberalism, maintaining that a multicultural society consists of diverse religious and moral outlook. It contends that if liberals are to view seriously such diversity, they must recognize the fact that liberalism is just one of the many substantive outlooks based on the specific view of human society. The above discourse does not in any way suggest that multiculturalism has been without attack or criticism. There is the criticism based on the ideas of liberal toleration, freedom of conscience and association. Chandran Kukathos for example has argued against the existence of group rights. By granting cultural groups special protections and rights, the state oversteps its role which is to secure civility and risks undermining individual rights of association. According to Kukathose (1995) states should not pursue "cultural integration or cultural engineering but rather a politics of indifference" (p.15).

Kukathos (1995) view would have been more meritorious if most states as a matter of practice adopt the policy of indifference, but this is not exactly so. States operate in almost every ramification the "politics of interest" rather than "indifference". Besides, if we can affirm individual rights as meaningful, then it makes sense to speak of group rights. In a sense "human rights" are group rights and there are several other categories of group rights.

The other criticism is the view that multiculturalism is a "politics of recognition" that deviates from a politics of redistribution. A politics of recognition challenges status inequality and the remedy it seeks is cultural and symbolic change. Its focus on culture and identity diverts attention from and actively undermine the struggle for economic justice. Again, this argument takes for granted the existence of a neat or clear cut differentiation between recognition and redistribution, between cultural and economic justice, and between culture (values) and economic interest or development. On the contrary, a peoples culture contains the germs of whatever interest it has or may have (whether economic, political or religious). As the culture undergoes modification by virtue of external influences, the interests gets modified as well.

Besides, it does not seem correct as the argument above portrays that recognition cannot influence or stimulate redistribution. As a matter of fact recognition could be the sole basis for redistribution. Worthy of note also is the criticism that comes from those who are concerned with the question of reconciling the diversity of society with homogenization. The point of emphasis against multiculturalism is the impeding of the full integration and acceptance of immigrants into host country and hence leading to disunity. This argument needs to be further qualified to be effective, as it ignores the right to citizenship and indigenization provisions in most cultures.

Finally, Putnam (2007) has argued against multiculturalism by insisting that the more racially diverse a culture is, the greater the lost of trust. He asserts:

> We hunker down. We act like turtles. The effect of diversity is
> worse than had been imagined. And it is not just that we don't trust

people who are not like us. In diverse communities, we don't trust
people who do look like us (p.30).

Putnam's view is difficult to swallow hook, line and sinker in that it contains elements of exaggeration. Though his view may be true in specific instances, it is wrong to conclude that all multicultural societies must suffer this predicament to the extent that in such cultural settings meaningful cooperation is impossible. Even in non-multicultural societies distrust exist, sometimes not just on the basis of religion (but sects of the same religion), and sometimes for other reasons.

Attractive as these and other criticisms of multiculturalism appears to be, the crux of the matter is that they are not so compelling to warrant to total rejection of multiculturalism in view of its positive potentials. Perhaps, what these criticisms should demand is a revision of some of the principles of multiculturalism in order to cater for the varied forms of social consciousness and value systems. Infact, in my opinion, the adoption of multiculturalism would provide a sure base for Africa's integration and development. This issue I think deserves our immediate attention.

4. Multiculturalism: Some Implications for Sustainable Development in Africa

Modernity has brought a situation where more people are disillusioned about the prospects associated with it especially in Africa. With diverse and some more intimidating socio-political and economic philosophies making incursions into Africa, the ordinary African feels estranged and ostracized from his real socio-cultural foundations. Hence, for some Africans the incursions at best seems to carry with it new moralities and entrenchment of trivial banalities. Yet the acceptance of this incursion seems to be the acceptance of a cruel wound on the moral fabric of the African society leaving behind putrefying moral sores.

For this reason, some person argue that the acceptance of a multicultural philosophy or society tantamount to compromising Africa's bedrock culture with a new one. This compromise becomes extremely difficult the more groups demand for the restructuring of the previous culture and reshaping the economic, political and other aspects or spheres of the society. In addition, multicultural societies dominant culture may clandestinely manipulate the system to retain the power dynamics and prevent the flourishing of subcultures.

In my view, these arguments are not impeccable to warrant a total rejection of multiculturalism as a philosophy in Africa. One basic fact of the African social formation is its composition by ethnic nationalities or multi-ethnic groups.

Although the existence of multi-ethnic nationalities does not itself constitute an issue with political consequences, the process of social change or modernization has raised or increased the interest of these groups and elevates them to the political realm. This is an issue for further research. The point of emphasis here is that African culture or society has never really been homogenous and this explains why multicultural influences will not be strange to it, but rather enhance speedy integration required for development.

A critic may point to the fact that inspite of the multicultural outlook of Africa that there are still conflicts of various kinds-religious, political and economic. A quick response would be that conflicts are inevitable in human existence. As a matter of fact, right after independence, African leaders saw that ethnicity or tribalism was one sure developmental setback for Africa, but rather than embark on genuine integration drive, they politicized the need and developed a level of greed and insensitivity that makes the colonialist exploit in Africa almost a non issue. The above fact notwithstanding, there is the likelihood that an official multicultural policy would minimize to the barest minimum the occurrences of these conflicts.

For instance, multiculturalism enhances an appreciation of the value of diversity and differences in a democratic culture, thus helping to integrate diverse cultures into the larger society without cutting them off from their past. This in turn helps to reinforce the polity because citizens are willing to make sacrifices or compromises for those with whom they have common project or interest. The diffusion of commonly shared values promotes integration.

In addition, the balance which multiculturalism promotes between equality and protection of rights of persons will enhance effective democratization and the development of a sound political culture. As a policy of accommodation, tolerance and inclusiveness without prejudice, discrimination on the basis of origin, sex, religion and ethnic association would be minimized. Closely related to the above is the issue of language. Not only has language differences served as basis of discrimination and segregation but has been very potent instrument or indices that determines who gets what kind of development. Some African nations in recognition of this problem pose by the existence of numerous languages, and the role of language in integration and development have adopted what they call "national language(s)". These they have done by the selection of one, two or three local languages acclaimed to be widely spoken and elevating same to a national status.

This approach has been counter-productive in most cases for several reasons. Firstly, it amounts to replacing a primary discrimination with a tertiary one, thereby extending the bounds of discrimination and giving same an official stamp. Secondly, non speakers of such elevated languages view this as an attempt to arrogantly impose on them values that are alien.

Thus, these efforts rather than engender integration and development has brought about suspicion, and distrust. Furthermore speakers of the "minor languages" have introduced these so called minor languages in educational curriculum at the local levels to check the flourishing of the national languages, and whatever cultural or value re-orientation it aimed to achieve. Such surreptitious elevation of some languages and consequently, some values and practices at the expense of others is bound to have social consequences, because local languages are the most veritable tool for social mobilization and the building blocks for learning.

The point is that the affirmation and recognition of the importance of all languages and promotion of a cultural and political climate that encourages their flourishing should be a basic starting point in the search for a national language.
This will ensure that when a national language emerges ultimately through the natural processes of adjustments, persuasion and mutual acceptability, a climate that fosters and encourages sustainable development would have been in place.

Multiculturalism provides the required background for appropriate modifications of the diversities in languages and other cultural attributes to enhance development.

Directly linked to the language problem is the majority and minority problem in African states or nations. These problem manifests whenever the major or larger ethnic groups appeal directly or indirectly to its numerical strength to allot more than its fair share of social goods to itself. In other word when numerical strength is considered the sole or most important criterion in the distribution of social goods. The minor or small ethnic groups are thus conceived as no more than existential appendages. Such situations generate unnecessary tensions that slow down both integration and development. Gwunireama (2008) has this in mind when he notes that "… there are tensions arising from expression of identity of members and therefore accommodations are necessary" (p.92).

He notes also that in a sense it seems fair to equate minority status with discrimination and regard the dominating group as a majority regardless of the numerical strength. The crucial point he makes however, is that the individual minority is intrinsically involved in the composition and institutionalization of the majority, which is the minority "writ large". Again, multiculturalism as a philosophy of accommodation can serve as a mediating philosophy mitigating as it were the majority and minority problem, as well as all other associated problems.

Lastly, poverty remains a very serious threat to democratization and development in Africa. As a multifaceted phenomenon, poverty finds expression in virtually all aspects or sphere's of activity in the African continent, hence, typically characterized with political, economic or cultural deprivations. A multicultural philosophy can shorten or prevent transient poverty from transforming to an absolute kind. In fact, the non-material dimensions of poverty can effectively be checked while a formidable base is provided for minimizing the material dimensions of poverty. For emphasis, reduction of the levels or dimensions of poverty is also one vital tool for the elimination of apathy in matters of governance, or political commitment by Africans; which in turn is a necessity, if corruption is to be tackled headlong.

5. Recommendations and Conclusion

Multiculturalism is a fact of life in the sense that virtually every human culture is influenced by another in terms of lending and borrowing new ways of life, music, food, art and even knowledge. It is such interactions that make life meaningful in a sense. As a matter of fact, despite resistances against multicultural influences, most societies are already multicultural and characterized by cultural hybridity. This fact is what Jeremy Waldron (1990) emphasizes when he argues that:

> We live in a world formed by technology and trade; by economic, religious and political imperialism and their offspring; by mass migration and dispersion of cultural influences. In this context, to immerse oneself in the traditional practices of, say, an aboriginal culture might be a fascinating anthropological experiment but it involves an artificial dislocation from what actually is going on in the world (p.100).

Africa must, therefore, come to terms with the fact of the reality of dwindling traditional values or morality. It must without delay recover from the grief and shock of colonialism like other colonized continents which are presently making scientific, technological and other uncommon achievements or contributions globally to move the world forward. Africa, while accepting its socio-historical past, must develop a new conceptual and developmental paradigm that affirms the reality of the past but does not suffer disconnect with the present. It must do away with "unwarranted cautions" for anything non African. In other words, Africa must accept its history, refuse to complain in perpetuity, and face squarely the challenges of a new world order.

Only then will Africa refuse to interpreted global social and political changes as affront on its social and collective integrity, aimed primarily at marginalizing her. This new philosophy requires openness, acceptability, interdependence, tolerance, accommodation and effective integration. In this renewed effort multiculturalism remains the best bait. A multicultural philosophy would promote unity and in turn can fast track development. This seems sure in view of the multicultural aim of promoting oneness of life among different cultures of society. Such unity in the midst of diversity is a fundamental cornerstone for Africa's integration. Finally, the need to enforce or maintain universal equality while at the same time protect individual or group rights will ensure a social balance that promotes the democratic culture of tolerance and accommodation required for a sustainable development.

Sustainable development in this sense will be all encompassing and not one dimensional, which often times, improvement in one sphere creates disequilibrium in several others. There would be quantitative progress (economic) but enhanced and provided for by efficient structural changes (qualitative changes) in attitudes, environmental care, intellectual depth and growth, as well as a general willingly and commitment to social progress.

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