Cultural Appropriation

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When individuals belonging from a culture adopt the cultural artifacts of some other culture, for instance, American models wearing African tribal hats and clothes, it shows that they are appropriating from the other culture. This phenomenon is known as cultural appropriation. This is a controversial debate and masses discourage such practices. Similarly, scholars spend years doing ethnographic research and explore various cultures, however, this concept is still problematic to the masses. Likewise, when people culturally appropriate the culture-specific items or cuisines from outside their culture, they forget the context and often misuse it to give an exotic semblance. This practice often results in damaging the cultural essence of minority groups in the presence of a majority group. For instance, in America, White celebrities culturally appropriate the items of African culture but while doing so, they forget the elements of respect and consideration. Besides, it is quite hypocritical that the dominant culture adopts elements of other culture but fails to show a considerate attitude, instead it forces minority groups to assimilate with the dominant culture.

The knowledge about cultural appropriation is extremely insignificant among masses all over the world and it also signifies the cultural dominance of one culture over the other cultures since it allows them to take a trip of other cultures and take up various traditional practices from it. In the same manner, this practice symbolizes the colonial control and its extension, in the form of cultural capitalism in the twenty-first century in lieu of neo-colonialism. Cultural appropriation often carries political and marketing strategies (The Aesthetics of Diaspora: Ownership and Appropriation). However, amidst all these oppositions, some people view this as a positive practice that allows people to learn more about the other culture. They consider it synonymous with cultural exchange programs and practices since in both ways, masses are familiarizing themselves with other cultures.

Cultural appropriation has many hidden agendas and nuances because when White people culturally appropriate elements from the other culture, they do it because of two reasons, either to exoticize the other culture or showcase their White supremacist ideology over the African and Asian cultures. Likewise, when people of color wear their cultural artifacts such as clothes or speak in their native languages, they have to face racial prejudice because the dominant culture wants them to assimilate in their culture exclusively. Quite on the contrary, when a White celebrity adopts cultural elements from the Black culture, it instantly becomes a fashion highlight. American mass media starts broadcasting it under the highlight of cultural exchange. In reality, cultural exchange has to be done on both sides because it requires equal participation from both countries (The Aesthetics of Diaspora: Ownership and Appropriation). Cultural appropriation sidelines the racial issues because it is encouraged to achieve political agendas and commercial benefits to attract the audience.

Besides, it violates the cultural spaces because people belonging to a certain culture have more contextual knowledge about various traditions and practices. It endangers their traditions since they already live under the oppression and imperial control of the first world countries. This creates psychological unrest in them because they are not allowed to represent their culture in front of the world and some outsider has violated their freedom of expression. They are more entitled to their culture than any outsider because their culture is formed by them and it has many symbolic values attached. I agree with the commentators in the podcast when they say that Cultural appropriation has many downsides attached to it. This practice is very common in those countries who were once colonized and they are well aware of the imperial control (Cultural Appropriation...It’s Not Just a White Thing). Likewise, under the colonial rule narrative power was taken away from them and the former imperialist forces enforced their cultural practices under the label of white man’s burden. In this context, they are not uncommon in Western tactics to attack their culture and identity by using soft power control. For instance, Jazz music and rap music genres were introduced by Black Americans in America but these genres gain popularity when they were adopted by the White Americans.

Gina Mei's biracial experiences symbolize the idea of double consciousness because people belonging to her native land views her as an individual who is assimilated in her home culture (Cultural Appropriation...It’s Not Just a White Thing). Quite on the contrary, American people perceive her as either Mexican or Latino but not as Chinese. People cannot let her decide her identity and culture she belongs to because of the dangers of cultural appropriation. In this scenario, such an attitude of people symbolizes the problems faced by diasporas in other cultural spaces. Diasporas are placed in such a position where they have to constantly justify their association with their native past and at the same time, they have to show loyalty to their home country. They cannot develop a sense of belongingness to only one land, otherwise, they will be accused of assimilating in the other culture. These diasporic individuals are accused of Cultural invalidation because they are positioned at the marginal position of both the cultures.

The cultural experiences of many immigrants are synonymous with Gina Mei's experience in America because in schools and public spaces, natives try to recognize their ethnicity by judging their facial features and often mistake them as either Mexicans or Latinos. Immigrants coming from Latin America form the largest immigrant population group in America. They are judged severely on their native cultural association and in the other country, masses expect them to appreciate their home culture and traditions because they want them to honor their culture. This situation makes Cultural appropriation a controversial debate because it allows the dominant culture to exercise their power and diplomatic policies to glorify their culture against the minority culture. On the other hand, African and Asian cultures feel threatened by the White Americans when they attempt to culturally appropriate other cultures.

References

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