



Multiculturalism

Rivana Khaled Helal



A.2
BWB

Multiculturalism is more than cultural coexistence, it is shaped by the governmental policies, historical narratives, and social structures that determine who feels included, who is visible, and whose identity becomes the norm. My research question investigates: To what extent are diversity and belonging controlled and shaped by governments, societies, and historical contexts-and how do young people experience these forces in schools and communities? To explore this question, I used my own experience and compared it to experiences to students in Ghana and California of the USA, while also drawing on knowledge about nation-structure, migration, identity, and cultural policy through the internet.

In all three contexts, I discovered that belonging is both a feeling of the self and an outcome of national choice like governments establish the rules on language, education, and citizenship; societies frame social requirements, and history creates which identities have symbolic power. These are the forces that inform the ways in which youth make claims to identities.

Jordan's historical development must be acknowledged in order to comprehend its background. Jordan's multicultural fabric has been shaped by multiple migration throughout the years, each of which has left its spot on the country's demographics. Historian Betty Anderson claims that in order to unite unlike groups into a cohesive national outline, Jordan's identity was created around unity. Nonetheless, some acknowledged that distinctions, such as belonging to a minority ethnic group or speaking a different dialect of Arabic, can still separate them. This is an example of how societies, even the most inclusive ones, establish historical based informal hierarchies of identity. Therefore, national cohesion and subdued expectations of what "Jordanian identity" must to sound and look like shape the Jordanian sense of fitting.



Ghana presents another apt example. It is one of the most culturally and linguistically varied countries in West Africa, with over 70 languages and countless ethnic groups. Yet Ghanaian nation building has traditionally kept the idea of unity across difference at its core. According to political scholar Kwame Boafo-Arthur, post-independence governments went about building a fit national identity to minimize ethnic competition (Boafo-Arthur, 2003). Thus, English became the official language of education and government, while some dominant languages like Akan gained more public visibility than others. The students I interviewed that had studied in Ghana similarly described multicultural festivals and national holidays that celebrated Ghanaian unity, yet explained that speaking smaller languages in school was still "out of place." In this way, governments can help diversity while favoring particular cultural languages over others. Ghana's push for unity strengthens national identity but also creates a quiet hierarchy of languages and cultural visibility.

California, on the other hand, provides another model where multiculturalism is combined into the legislation. According to historian Ronald Takaki, the state's individuality has been shaped by constant immigration, which forced governments to implement inclusive policies in order to support a variety of peoples (Takaki 1993). These days, these include ethnic studies classes, cultural clubs, bilingual education initiatives, and anti-discrimination laws. The Californian student I spoke with talked about schools that publicly celebrated cultural diversity. "Your culture is part of what makes you interesting," a student informed me. Nobody anticipates that you will conceal it.



The difference is significant. Whereas Ghana or Jordan seeks unity and shared narratives that guide diversity, California's method of negotiation places strong public recognition of difference at the center. Its approach seems to indicate that it views belonging as something generated through allowing each identity its visible space rather than blending identities together. Each of the three examples illustrates something of the ways in which governments and societies construct multicultural experiences. Jordan's narrative of hospitality constructs a sense of shared belonging but also quiet expectations.

Although Ghana's dedication to unity helps to maintain social stability, it occasionally makes minority languages less visible. The open cultural expression of various groups is made possible by California's institutional support for diversity, but it can also drive a wedge between communities with disparate resources. These results are significantly influenced by the historical context. Their current multicultural structures are shaped by Ghana's colonial past, California's history of immigration and civil rights activism, and Jordan's status as a regional refuge. In Jordan, coexistence and resilience are associated with national identity. It is associated with national unity and independence in Ghana. Diversity is the foundation of California's state identity.

The Ghanaian students I spoke with expressed pride in the country's unity, but they also admitted that they occasionally avoided using their mother tongue in class to fit in with the prevailing norms. Students in California said their schools made multiculturalism feel "normal" rather than exceptional, and many said they felt encouraged to share their cultural customs.

One striking similarity emerges among the differences: young people want to see visibility, respect, and authenticity. Students feel more confident and included when schools allow for diverse experiences through representation, celebrations, and curricula.



In this instance, students start modifying themselves even though no one has explicitly instructed them to do so when some identities are regarded as more normal than others. One main conclusion that results from this is that multiculturalism does not occur on its own. Laws, educational institutions, the media, national narratives, and commemorations all contribute to its construction. Which languages to teach, whose histories to recall, and which cultures to include in textbooks are all decided by the state. Norms about who belongs and who stands out are upheld by society. The significance of identity itself is created by history. According to my research, systems that view diversity as a resource to be promoted rather than as a challenge to be managed have the strongest sense of belonging.

When certain identities are seen as more normal than others, students begin altering themselves even though no one has specifically told them to. This leads to several key conclusions, one of which is that multiculturalism does not happen by itself. Its construction is influenced by laws, educational institutions, the media, national narratives, and commemorations. The state determines which cultures to include in textbooks, which languages to teach, and whose histories to remember. Society upholds norms about who belongs and who stands out. History is what gives identity its significance. My research indicates that systems with the strongest sense of belonging are those that see diversity as a resource to be promoted rather than as a challenge to be managed.



Works Cited

- Anderson, Betty S. *Nationalist Voices in Jordan: The Street and the State*. University of Texas Press, 2005.
- Boafo-Arthur, Kwame. "The Politics of the 2000 General Elections in Ghana." *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2003, pp. 205–235.
- Student from Ghana. Personal interview. 2025.**
- Gonzalez, Norma, et al., editors. *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms*. Routledge, 2005.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, pp. 222–237.
- Hoffman, Katherine E. "Language, Identity, and Education in the Middle East." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2002, pp. 203–225.
- Kymlicka, Will. *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Laitin, David D. *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad*. Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Mazrui, Ali A., and Alamin M. Mazrui. *The Power of Babel: Language and Governance in the African Experience*. University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Nugent, Paul. *Africa Since Independence: A Comparative History*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2015.
- Putnam, Robert D. "E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century." *Scandinavian Political Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2007, pp. 137–174.
- Schmidt, Bettina. *Anthropology of Migration and Multiculturalism: New Directions*. Routledge, 2010.
- Sefa Dei, George J. *Reconstructing 'Dropout': A Critical Ethnography of the Dynamics of Black Students' Disengagement from School*. University of Toronto Press, 1997.
- Shryock, Andrew. *Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination: Oral History and Textual Authority in Tribal Jordan*. University of California Press, 1997.
- Smith, Anthony D. *National Identity*. University of Nevada Press, 1991.



Takaki, Ronald. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. Little, Brown and Company, 1993.

Tarrow, Sidney. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Vertovec, Steven. *Transnationalism*. Routledge, 2009.

Waters, Mary C., and Reed Ueda, editors. *The New Americans: A Guide to Immigration since 1965*. Harvard University Press, 2007.

Student from California. Personal interview. 2025.

Helal, Rivana. Personal reflection interview. 2025.

Student from Ghana. Personal interview. 2025.

